

# THE ARGOSY.

NOVEMBER 1, 1870.

---

## BESSY RANE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

---

### CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ONCE AGAIN.

JELLY lived, so to say, with her feet on a volcano. She felt that, figuratively speaking, there was not an hour of the day or night but she might be blown up. The rumours as to the death of Mrs. Rane were becoming more frightful; they stole up and down Dallory like an insinuating tongue of flame, and Jelly had the satisfaction of knowing that it was she who had first set the flame alight. It was all very well for her to say that she had made herself safe by securing the evidence Thomas Hepburn could give: but in her secret conscience she knew that she was *not* secure; and that, even in spite of that evidence, Dr. Rane might chance to be innocent. If so, why a pretty box she would find herself in. There was no help for it; she could do nothing. The flaming tongue went twisting itself in and out, and she could not still it.

One night Jelly was lying awake, according to custom now, buried deep in some horrid visions that had lately begun to haunt her: now of being chained to some other woman and working in a gang; now of stepping incessantly up a revolving treadmill; and now of picking oakum with her nails and teeth. Twisting round in the bed, to escape, if possible, these imaginary pictures, she suddenly heard her door knocked at. A loud hasty knock; and now a louder. Jelly went into a hot fume, and then turned cold as ice. Had the officers of the law come to arrest her?

"Who's there?—what is it?" she asked faintly, not daring to sit up in bed.

"Art thee awake, Jelly?" came the gentle response, as her door was

opened a few inches. "I am very sorry to have to ask thee to get up, but my mother is worse. Make haste, please."

Had Miss Beverage's voice been that of an angel, it could not have seemed sweeter to Jelly just then. The relief was great.

"I'll get up instantly, ma'am," was the ready answer—and Miss Beverage wondered that it should have in it a tone of joyous gratitude. "I'll be with you at once."

Mrs. Beverage was subject to violent but rare attacks of dangerous spasms. She had felt ill before she went to bed, but hoped it would be nothing. Jelly and her own two servants were soon at her bedside. She was very ill. Some of them ran to get hot water ready; Jelly thought it would be well to call in Dr. Rane.

"I should like the doctor to see her; at the same time I grieve to arouse him from his sleep," said Miss Beverage.

"Law, ma'am, that's nothing to doctors; they are used to it," cried Jelly.

"Mother, would thee like Oliver Rane fetched?" asked Miss Beverage, bending over the suffering lady.

"Yes—yes," was the feeble answer. "I am very ill, Sarah."

"Thee go, then, Jelly."

Away went Jelly. Unbarring their own front door, she passed out of it, and approached Dr. Rane's. The doctor's professional lamp burnt clearly, and to her great surprise, Jelly saw that the door was not closed.

"He cannot have gone to bed to-night," she thought, as she walked in without ringing. It was past three.

But the house seemed to be in stillness and darkness. Jelly left the front door open, and the light shone a little way into the passage. She tried the surgery door; it was locked outside; she tried the dining-room; the key of that was also turned; the kitchen door stood open, but it was all in darkness.

"He has gone to bed and forgot to shut up," was the conclusion Jelly now arrived at. "I'll go up and call him."

Groping her way upstairs, she had nearly reached the top, when a pale white light suddenly illumined the landing—just the same kind of faint semi-light that Jelly saw once before, and that she remembered all too well. Raising her head hastily to look, for it had been bent downwards, there stood—what?

Not quite at the moment did Jelly know what. Not in the first startled access of terror did she recognize clearly the features of Bessy Rane. It was she, all too surely: that is, the likeness of what she had been. She seemed to stand almost face to face with Jelly: Jelly nearly at the top of the staircase, she facing it before her. The light was even more faint in front of the figure than behind: but there was no mistaking it. What it was dressed in or whence it came, Jelly never knew; there it was—the form and face of Bessy Rane. With an awful cry of

agony, that echoed to the ends of the empty house in the night's silence, Jelly turned and flew down again.

She never looked behind. Out at the front door went she, banging it in her terror, to keep in what might be following her; and she nearly gave vent to another scream when she found herself touched by some one coming in at the gate, and saw that it was Dr. Rane.

"I am called out to a country patient," he quietly said. "While I was putting the horse to the gig, an impression came over me that I had left my house door open, so I thought I had better come back and see. What are you doing here at this hour, Jelly? Anybody ill?"

Jelly was in frightful distress and confusion of mind. Clutching hold of his arm as if it gave her protection, she sobbed for an instant or two in hysterical nervousness. Dr. Rane stared at her, not knowing what to make of it. He began to think she must require his services herself.

"Sir—do you know—do you know who is in the house?"

"Nobody's there: unless they've got in these last few minutes through the door—which I suppose I did leave open," was Dr. Rane's rejoinder, and his calm composure contrasted strongly with Jelly's emotion. "When I go out of my house at night, I carry my household with me, Jelly."

"Your wife's there," she whispered with a bursting sob. "Sir, it is as true as that I am alive to tell it."

"What do you say?"

Jelly's answer was to relate what she had seen. When Dr. Rane had gathered in her full meaning, he turned very angry.

"Why, you must be mad, woman," he cried, in a low voice of concentrated passion. "This is the second time. How dare you invent such folly?"

"I swear that her ghost walks, and that it is in there now," exclaimed Jelly, nearly beside herself. "It is on the landing, exactly where I saw it before. Why should she come again—why should she haunt that one particular spot? Sir, don't look at me like that. You know I would not invent such a thing."

"Your fancy invents it, and then you speak of it as if it were fact. How dare you?"

But he could not appease Jelly: he could not talk her out of the belief of her eyesight. And the doctor saw it was useless to try.

"Why—why should her poor ghost walk?" bewailed Jelly, wringing her hands in distress.

"I'm sure I don't know why it should walk," returned the doctor, as if he would humour Jelly and at the same time make a mockery of her words. "It never walks when I am in the house." But the ridicule was lost on Jelly.

"She can't lie quiet in her grave. What cause is there?—oh, what dreadful mystery is it?"

Dr. Rane looked as though he would have liked to knock Jelly down. "I begin to think that you are either a fool or a knave," he cried. "What brought you in my house at three o'clock in the morning?"

The question, together with his almost irrepressible rage, served to recall Jelly's scattered senses. She told about the illness of Mrs. Beverage, and asked if he would come in.

"No, I cannot come," said Dr. Rane quite savagely, for it seemed that he could not get over his anger. "I am called out to a case of sudden emergency, and have no time to waste over Mrs. Beverage. If she wants a doctor, get Seeley."

He opened his door with his latch-key, and shut it fiercely after him. However, it seemed that he got over his ill humour, for when Jelly was slowly walking across the road towards Mr. Seeley's, Dr. Rane came out again, called her back, and said he would spare a minute or two.

With a sharp caution to Jelly not to make the same foolish exhibition of herself to others as she had to him, he went up to Mrs. Beverage—who was then easier, and had dozed off to sleep. Giving a few general directions in case the paroxysm should return, Dr. Rane departed. About ten minutes afterwards, Jelly was in her room, which looked towards the lane at the back, when she heard his gig come driving down it and stop at his garden door. After waiting there a short while,—he had probably come in for some case of instruments—it went away quickly across country.

The horse and gig that the doctor used belonged to the public-house hard by. Dr. Rane had a key of the stables, so that if he wanted to go out during the night, he could harness the horse to the gig without disturbing any one. When medical men are not able to keep horses and grooms of their own, they put up contentedly with many shifts that richer practitioners would not.

"If he had not said beforehand that he was putting the horse to, I should have thought he'd gone out because he daredn't stay in the house," muttered Jelly, as she flattened her face against the window-pane, to look after the doctor and the gig. She could see neither: the night was very dark.

Jelly's mind was in a chaos. What she had witnessed caused her still to shake and tremble as though she had the ague; and she did fully believe that she was in danger of becoming what the doctor had told her she was already—mad.

Suddenly, there arose a cry in the house. Mrs. Beverage was worse. The paroxysm had returned so violently, that it seemed to the frightened beholders as though she would die in it. Dr. Rane was not attainable, and Miss Beverage sent one of the under servants running for Mr. Seeley. Who came promptly.

In about an hour the danger had passed; the house was quiet again, and Mr. Seeley was at liberty to return to his rest. He had crossed



the road to his own door when he heard a step following him. Turning round, he saw Jelly.

"Surely she is not ill again!" he hastily exclaimed.

"No, sir; she is all right I think now. Mr. Seeley," added Jelly, in agitation so marked that he could not help noticing it, "I want to speak to you: I want to tell you something. I must tell somebody, or I shall never live till morning light."

"Are *you* ill?" questioned Mr. Seeley.

"When I was holding the flannels just now, and otherwise helping you, sir, you might have seen that I hadn't all my wits about me. Miss Beverage looked at me once or twice, as much as to ask what had become of 'em. Mr. Seeley, I have got the weight of a most awful secret upon me, and I can't any longer bear with it."

"A secret!" repeated Mr. Seeley.

Jelly drew so near to him that her arm touched his. She pointed to the house of Dr. Rane, and lowered her voice to speak in a whisper.

"Mrs. Rane's there."

He looked across at the house—so apparently still and peaceful behind its white blinds; he turned and looked at Jelly. Not a syllable did he understand of her meaning.

"Mrs. Rane comes again, sir. She haunts the house. I have seen her twice with my own eyes. Once, the night of her death, just after she had been put in her coffin; and again this blessed night."

"Why, what on earth do you mean?" questioned Mr. Seeley, in amazement. "Mrs. Rane haunts the house?—I don't comprehend."

"Her ghost does, sir. It is in it now!"

The surgeon put his back against his door-post, and seemed as though he should never leave off staring at Jelly. He fully thought her mind was wandering. A minute or two passed in utter silence.

"My good woman, you need a composing draught as badly as Friend Beverage did just now. What is the matter with you, Jelly?"

In reply, Jelly told her story,—in regard to the appearance of Mrs. Rane—told it from the beginning. But she cautiously avoided all mention of suspicion as to unfair play: in fact she did not mention Dr. Rane's name. Mr. Seeley listened quietly, as though he were hearing a fairy tale.

"Have you spoken of this to Dr. Rane?" was his first question.

"Yes, sir: both times. To-night I met him as I was rushing out of the house in my terror."

"What does he say to it?"

"He ridicules it. He says it's my fancy, and is in a towering rage with me. Mrs. Gass asked whether I had been drinking beer. People are hard of belief as to such things."

"You told Mrs. Gass, then?"

"I told her the first time. I was in great distress and perplexity,

and I mentioned it to her as we sat together in the churchyard looking at Mrs. Rane's funeral."

"What did Mrs. Gass say?"

"She cautioned me never to speak of it again to living soul. Neither of that, nor of—of anything. But this blessed night, sir, I have seen it again: and if it is to go on like this, I shall soon be in a lunatic asylum."

Mr. Seeley had no faith in ghosts. At the same time he saw how implicit was Jelly's belief in what she fancied she had seen, and the distressed state of mind it had induced. What to answer for the best, he did not know. If he threw ridicule on the story, it would make no sort of impression; if he pretended to receive it as truth, it could not bring her ease.

"Jelly," said he, on impulse, "I should not believe in a ghost if I saw one."

"I didn't believe in them once," answered Jelly. "But seeing brings belief."

"I'm sure I don't know what to say to you," was his candid avowal. "You are evidently so imbued with your own view of the matter, that any contrary argument would be useless."

"What troubles me is this," resumed Jelly, as if she had not heard him. "*Why* is it that she is unable to rest, poor thing? What's the reason?"

"I should say there was no reason," observed Mr. Seeley.

"Should you, sir?"

Jelly spoke significantly, and he looked at her keenly. There was a professional lamp over the door, as there was over Dr. Rane's; and their faces were distinct to each other. The tone had been a slip in the heat of argument, and Jelly grew cautious again.

"What am I to do, sir?"

"Indeed I cannot tell you, Jelly. There is only one thing to do, I should say—get out of the fancy again as quickly as you can."

"You think I did not see it!"

"I think all ghost-stories proceed purely from an excited imagination," said the surgeon.

"You have not lived here very long, sir, but you have been here quite long enough to know that I've not got much imagination. I don't remember that, before this happened, I ever felt excited in my whole life. My nature's not that way. The first time I saw her, I had come in, as I say, from Ketlar's; and all I was thinking of was Dinah's negligence in not putting out the matches for me. I declare that when I saw her, poor thing, that night, with her fixed eyes staring at me, I was as cool as any cucumber. She stood there some time, looking at me with a stony stare, as it seemed, and I stood in the dark, looking at her. I thought it was herself, Mr. Seeley, and felt glad that she was

able to be out of bed. In the morning, when I heard she was dead, and shut up in her coffin, I thought she must have been shut in it alive. You were the first I asked whether it was true that she was dead," added Jelly, warming with the sudden recollection. "I saw you standing here at the door after Dinah told me, and I stepped over."

The surgeon nodded. He remembered it.

"To-night when I went for Dr. Rane, there was not a thought or particle of superstition in my mind. I was troubled about Mrs. Beverage, and wondering what carelessness brought the doctor's front door open. And there she stood!—facing me as I went up the stairs—just in the same identical spot that she had stood the time before. Ugh!" broke off Jelly, with a shudder. "But don't say again, sir, please, that it was my excited imagination."

"I could tell you stories of the imagination that would surprise you, Jelly."

"If it was not Mrs. Rane—that is, her apparition—that appeared to me to-night, sir, and that appeared to me the other night, I wish these eyes may never behold anything again," spoke Jelly, solemnly. And Mr. Seeley saw how worse than futile it would be to contend farther.

"Jelly, why have you told me this? I do not see how I can help you."

"I've told it you because the weight of keeping it to myself was greater than I could bear," she replied. "It's an awful thing, and a cruel thing, that it should be just *me* that's signalled out for it. I think I know why: and I am nearly torn to pieces with the responsibility. As to helping me, sir, I don't think that you or anybody else can do that. Did you see Mrs. Rane after she died?"

The question was put abruptly, but in a tone that Jelly meant to be indifferent. Mr. Seeley replied in a very matter-of-fact manner.

"No."

"Well, I'll wish you good night, sir. Keeping you talking here will do no good."

"Good morning, I should say," returned the surgeon.

Jelly had reached her own gate, when she paused for a moment and then turned back across the road. The surgeon had not moved. He still had his back against his door-post, and was apparently gazing at Dr. Rane's. Jelly said what she had come back to say.

"You will please not speak of this again to any one, Mr. Seeley. There are reasons why."

"Not I, Jelly," was the hearty rejoinder. "I don't want to be laughed at in Dallory as the retailer of a ghost-story."

"Thank you, sir."

With that, the surgeon passed into his dwelling, and Jelly went over to hers. And the winter's night wore on to its close.

In the favourable reaction that had fallen on Mrs. Beverage, Jelly might have gone to rest again had she so chosen. But she did not. There could be neither rest nor sleep for her. She sat by the kitchen fire, and drank sundry cups of tea : and rather thought, what with one perplexity and another, that it was not sinful to wish herself dead.

In the morning about seven o'clock, when she was upstairs in her chamber, she heard the noise of a gig in the lane, and looked out. It was Dr. Rane, returning from his visit to his sick patient. His face was white. An ordinary passer-by would have said the doctor was cold : Jelly drew a different conclusion.

"It's his conscience," she mentally whispered. "It's the thought of having to dwell in his house now that he knows what's in it. He might have set it down to my fancy the first time : he can't this. Who knows, either, but what she appears to *him*?—who knows?—but it strikes me his nerves are made of iron. He must have been driving like mad, too, by the way the gig's splashed!" added Jelly, catching a glimpse of the state of the vehicle as it whirled round the corner towards the public-house. "Good heavens! what is to be done?—what is to be done about this dreadful secret? Why should it have fallen upon ME?"

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### COMING VERY NEAR.

It is not all at once, when rumours of this grave character arise, that they come to a climax. Time must be allowed them to grow and settle. It came at length, however, here. The doubts ripened to convictions; the semi-suppressed breathings widened into broad assertions : Oliver Rane had certainly murdered his wife for the sake of getting the tontine money. People affirmed it one to another as they met in the street—that is (throwing the onus off themselves), said that others affirmed it. Old Phillis heard it one day, and nearly fell down in a fit. She did not altogether believe it ; but nevertheless from that time she could not speak to her master without visibly shaking. The doctor thought she must be suffering from incipient palsy. At length it penetrated to Dallory Hall, to the ears of Madam ; and upon Madam it produced an extraordinary effect.

It has been stated throughout that Mrs. North had conceived a violent dislike to Dr. Rane ; or at least that she persistently acted against him in a manner that gave the impression that she had. As if she had only waited for this rumour to accuse him of something tangible, Madam took it up and made the cause her own. She never appeared to question the truth of the report, or to inquire what its grounds might be ; she drove about, almost like a mad woman, here, there, and everywhere,

unequivocally asserting that Bessy Rane had been poisoned, and that her husband, Oliver Rane, had done the deed.

In good truth, Mrs. North had been, if not mad, in a state of inward ferment for some short while past, ever since she had become cognisant of the expected return to England of Mr. Adair. Why she should dread this, and why it should excite her—and she did dread it and it did excite her in no measured degree—she alone knew. Nobody around her had the least idea that the coming home of Mr. Adair would be more to her than the arrival of any stranger might be. Restless, nervous, anxious, with an evil and crafty look in her eyes, with ears that were ever open, with hands that could not be still, waited Madam. The household saw nothing—only that her tyranny became more unbearable day by day.

It almost seemed as though she seized upon the whispered accusation of Dr. Rane as a vent for some of her uneasiness on this other score to exercise itself upon. He must be brought to the bar of justice to answer for his crime, avowed Madam. She drove to the houses of the different county magistrates, urging this view upon them; she besieged the county coroner in his office, and bade him get the necessary authority and issue his orders for the exhumation of the body.

The coroner was Mr. Dale. There had recently been a sharp contest for the coronership (which had become vacant) between a doctor and a lawyer: the latter was Dale, of Whitborough, and he had gained the day. To say that Madam, swooping down upon him with this command, startled him considerably, would be saying little, as describing his state of astonishment. Occupied very much just now with the proceedings attaching to his new honour, and the accounts it personally involved him in (which he made many a wry face over), Lawyer Dale had found less time for gossiping about his neighbours' affairs than usual; and not a syllable of the flying rumour had reached him. So little did he at first believe it, and so badly did he think of Madam for the part she was playing, that, had she been a man, he would have given her the lie direct. But she was persistent, repeating over and over to him the charge in the most obnoxious and least delicate manner possible: Oliver Rane had poisoned his wife during her attack of fever, and he had done it to get the tontine money. She went over the grounds for suspicion, dwelling on them one by one; and perhaps the lawyer's belief in Dr. Rane's innocence was just a trifle shaken—which he did not acknowledge. After some sparring between them—Mr. Dale holding back from interference, she pressing it on—the coroner was obliged to admit that if a demand for an inquest were formally made to him he should have no resource but to call one. Finally he undertook to institute some private inquiries into the matter, and see whether there were grounds to justify so extreme a course. Madam sharply replied that if there were the smallest disposition shown on



his part to stifle the inquiry, she should at once cause the Secretary of State to be communicated with. And with that she swept down to her carriage.

Perhaps, of all classes of men, lawyers are most brought into contact with the crimes and follies committed by the human race. Mr. Dale had not been at all scrupulous as to what he undertook; and many kinds of curious matters had come under his experience. Leaning back in his chair after Madam's visit, revolving this point of the story, revolving that, his opinion changed, and he came to the conclusion that, on the face of things, it did look very much as though Dr. Rane had been guilty. Lawyer Dale had no cause to wish the doctor harm: especially the awful harm a public investigation might entail: had the choice lain with him, he would have remained quiescent, and consigned the doctor to his conscience. But he saw clearly that Mrs. North would not suffer this to be, and that it was more than probable he would have to act.

The first move he made, in his undertaking to institute some private inquiry, was to seek an interview with Mr. Seeley. He went to it himself; the matter was of too delicate a nature to be confided to a clerk. In his questions he was reticent, after the cautious custom of a man of law, giving no clue, and intending to give none, as to why he put them; but Mr. Seeley had heard of the rumoured accusation, and spoke out freely.

"I confess that I could not quite understand the death," he avowed; "but I do not suspect that Dr. Rane, or any one else, had any hand in it. She died naturally, as I believe. Mr. Dale, this is a horrible thing for you to bring against him."

"I bring it!" cried Mr. Dale; "I don't bring it; I'd rather let the doubt lie and die out. It is forced upon me."

"Who by? These confounded scandal-mongers?"

"By Mrs. North."

"Mrs. North?" echoed the surgeon in surprise. "You don't mean to say the North family are taking it up."

"I don't know about the family. Madam is; and with a vengeance. She won't let it sleep. There is an evident animus in her mind against Dr. Rane, and she means to pursue the charge to its last extremity."

Mr. Seeley felt vexed to hear it. When these rare and grave charges are brought against one of the medical body, the rest, as a rule, would rather resent it than entertain it. And, besides, the surgeon liked Dr. Rane.

"Come; you may as well tell me the truth," cried the lawyer, breaking the silence. "You'll have to do it publicly, I fancy."

"Mr. Dale," was the answer, "I have told you the truth according to my belief. Never a suspicion of foul play crossed my mind in regard to Mrs. Rane's death. I saw nothing to give rise to one."



"You did not see her after she died : nor for some hours before it?"

"No."

"You think she went off naturally."

"Most certainly I think she did."

"But, look here—we lawyers have to probe opinions, you know, so excuse me. If you were to find it proved that she went off in—in a different way, you'd not be surprised, eh, Seeley?"

"I should be very much surprised."

"Hang it, man, don't you know what I mean? You would not be able, from your recollection of the facts attending the case, to confute it, or to bring forward a single confronting proof to say she did not?"

"Well, no ; I should not be able."

"There's the difficulty, you see," resumed the lawyer ; "there's where it will lie. You believe Rane was innocent, I may believe him innocent ; but nobody possesses positive proof of it, to bring forward, that might serve to stop the inquiry. It will have to go on as sure as fate."

"Cannot you stop it, Mr. Dale?"

"I promise you this : that I'll put as many impediments in the way of it as I can. But once I am called upon publicly to act, my own power to delay will be over."

That was the end of the interview. It had a little strengthened the lawyer's doubts, if anything. Mr. Seeley had not seen her after death. What he was going to do next Mr. Dale did not say.

By the day following this, perhaps the only two people accustomed to walk up and down the streets of Dallory who still remained in blissful ignorance of the trouble afloat, were Dr. Rane himself, and Richard North. Nobody had dared to mention it to *them*. Richard, however, was soon to be enlightened.

Business took him to his bankers in Whitborough. It was of a private nature, requiring to be transacted between himself and one of the old brothers at the head of the firm. After it was over they began talking about general things, and Richard asked incidentally whether much further delay would take place in paying the tontine money to Dr. Rane.

"I am not sure that we shall be able to pay it him at all," replied Sir Thomas Ticknell.

"Why not?" asked Richard in surprise.

For answer, the old gentleman looked significantly at Richard for a short space of time, and then demanded whether he was still in ignorance of what had become the chief public topic.

Bit by bit, it all came out. The brothers Ticknell, it appeared, had heard the report quite at the first : there are never wanting kind friends to do a fellow man an injury when they can ; and somebody had hastened to the bankers with the news. Richard North sat aghast as he listened. His sister was supposed to have come by her death

unfairly! For once in his life he changed to the hue of a sick man, and his strong frame trembled. Sir Thomas made him drink a glass of old wine.

"We hear the new coroner, Dale, has got it in hand now," remarked Sir Thomas. "I suppose there'll be a fine public scandal."

Recovering in some degree the shock, Richard North took his departure, and went over to Dale's, whose offices were nearly opposite. The lawyer was there, and made no scruple of disclosing what he knew to Richard.

"It's a pity that I've got to take the matter up," said Dale. "Considering the uncertainty at present attending it—that the doctor may be innocent—considering also that it cannot bring the dead to life, and that it will be a most painful thing for old Mr. North—and for you too, Mr. Richard—I think it would be as well to let it alone."

"But who is stirring in it?" asked Richard.

"Madam."

"Madam! Do you mean Mrs. North?"

"To be sure I do. I don't say but what public commotion and officious people would soon have brought it to the same issue; but, anyway, Mrs. North has forestalled them." And he told Richard of Madam's visit to him.

"You say you have been making some private inquiries," observed Richard.

Mr. Dale nodded.

"And what is your candid opinion? Tell it me, Dale."

But the lawyer hesitated to say to him, I think Dr. Rane may have been guilty. Hesitated not only because it was an unpleasant assertion to make to Dr. Rane's brother-in-law, but also because he really had doubts whether it was so or not.

"I hold no decided opinion as yet," he said. "I may not be able to form one until the post-mortem examination has taken place——"

"You do not mean to say that they will—that they will disturb my sister!" interrupted Richard North, his eyes full of horror.

"Why, that's the first thing they will do—if the investigation goes on at all," cried the lawyer. "That's always the preliminary step. You are forgetting."

"I suppose I am," groaned Richard. "This has been a great shock to me. Dale, you cannot believe him guilty?"

"Well, I can't tell; and that's the fact," candidly avowed the lawyer. "There are certainly some suspicious circumstances attending the case: but, at the same time, they are only such that Dr. Rane may be able to explain satisfactorily away."

"How have the doubts arisen?" questioned Richard. "There were none—I suppose—at the time."

"So far as I can at present ascertain, they have sprung from some

words incautiously dropped by Fanny Jelly, the late Mrs. Cumberland's maid. Whether Jelly saw anything at the time of Mrs. Rane's illness to give rise to suspicion, I don't know. I have not yet got to see her. It is necessary to go about this business cautiously, Mr. Richard North; and Jelly, I expect, will be no willing witness."

"Did Madam tell you this arose from Jelly?"

"Oh dear no! Madam does not concern herself as to whence the suspicions came; she says to me: 'There they are, and you must deal with them.' I got the information from my clerk, Timothy Wilks. In striving to trace the rumours back to their source, I traced them to him. Carpeting him here before me in this room, I insisted upon his telling me whence he obtained them. He answered me readily enough, 'from Jelly.' It seems Jelly was spending an evening at his aunt's, or cousin's, or grandmother's—whatever it is. I mean the wife of your timekeeper, Mr. Richard North. Wilks was present: only those three; the conversation turned upon Mrs. Rane's death, and Jelly said a few words that startled them. I quite believe that was the commencing link of the scandal."

"What can Jelly know?" exclaimed Richard, dreamily.

"I can't tell. The report is, that Mrs. Rane had something wrong given to her by her husband the last day of her life: and that his object was to get the tontine money, which he could not touch while she lived. A curious thing that the husband and wife should be the two last left in that tontine!" added the lawyer: "I've said so often."

"But, even"—Richard stopped from pain—"if this had been so, how could Jelly have learnt it?"

"Well, things come out in strange ways sometimes; especially if they are things that ought not to see the light. I've noticed it. Jelly's mistress was away, and she may have gone in to help nurse Mrs. Rane in her illness: we don't yet know how it was."

Richard North rose to depart. "At any rate, I do not see that it was Madam's place to take it up and urge on an inquiry," he remarked. "She should have left that to the discretion of my father and myself."

"She was in a regular fever over it," cried Mr. Dale. "She talked of sending an application to the Secretary of State. I shouldn't wonder but what it is already gone up."

From the lawyer's house, Richard went direct to that of the late Mrs. Cumberland. The dusk of evening was then drawing on. As he reached the door, Miss Beverage, in her Quaker's bonnet of dove-coloured silk, approached it from an opposite direction. Raising his hat, he asked whether he could be allowed a five minutes' interview with Jelly. Miss Beverage, who knew Richard by sight, was very chatty and pleasant: she took him into the drawing-room, and sent

Jelly to him. And Jelly felt half inclined to faint as she shut the door, for she well knew what must be coming.

But, after some fencing with Richard's questions, Jelly gave in. He was resolute in requiring to hear all she could tell, and at length she made a clean breast of it. She related what she knew, and what she suspected, from beginning to end; and before she had finished, a strangely soothing relief, that Richard should know it, grew up within her.

"For I shall consider that the responsibility is now taken off my shoulders, sir," she said. "And perhaps it has been nothing but this that the ill-fated lady has wanted me to do in coming again."

In all the tale, the part that most struck Richard North was Jelly's positive and clear assertion that she had since twice seen Mrs. Rane. He was simply astounded. And, to tell the truth, he did not seek to cast ridicule or disbelief on it. Richard North was an educated and practical man of plain common sense, with no more tendency to believe in supernatural appearances than are such men in general: but his mind had been so unhinged since the interview with Sir Thomas Ticknell, that he almost felt inclined to admit the possibility of his sister's not resting in her grave.

He sat with his head leaning on his hand. Collecting in some degree his half-scattered senses, he strove to go over dispassionately the grounds of suspicion. But he could make nothing more of them than Dale had said. Grounds for it there certainly were, but none but what Dr. Rane might be able to explain away. Jelly drew her own deductions, and called them proofs: but Richard saw that of proofs as yet there were none.

"I've lived in mortal horror, ever since that first night, of seeing it again," said Jelly, interrupting his reverie. "Nobody can imagine, sir, what a dreadful time it has been. And when I was least thinking of it, it came the second time."

"To whom have you repeated this story of having seen her?" asked Richard.

"The first time, I told Dr. Rane and Mrs. Cass. This last time, I told the doctor and Mr. Seeley."

"Jelly," said Richard, quietly, "there is no proof that anything was wrong, except in your fancy."

"And the hasty manner that she was hid out of the way, sir—no woman called in to do anything for her; no soul allowed to see her!" urged Jelly. "If it wanted proof positive before, it can't be thought to want it since what Thomas Hepburn related to me."

"All that may have been done out of regard to the welfare of the living," said Richard.

Jelly gave a disbelieving sniff. To her mind it was clearer than daylight.

But at this juncture, a servant came in to know if she should bring lights. Richard took the opportunity to depart. Of what use to prolong his stay? As he went out he saw Mr. Seeley standing at his door. Richard crossed over and asked to speak with him: he knew of Dale's interview with the surgeon.

"Can Rane have been guilty of this thing, or not?" questioned Richard, when they were closeted together.

But, no. Not even here could Richard get at any decided opinion. It might have been so, or it might not, Seeley replied. For himself, he was inclined to think it was *not*; that Mrs. Rane's death was natural.

Leaving again, Richard paced up and down the dark road. His mind was in a tumult. He, with Seeley, could not think Dr. Rane was guilty. And, even though he were, he began to question whether it would not be better for his father's sake, for all their sakes, to let the matter lie. Richard, pursuing his natural bias, put the two aspects together, and compared them. On the one side there would be the merited punishment of Oliver Rane and vengeance on Bessy's wrongs; the other would bring a terrible amount of pain, of exposure, almost of disgrace. And Richard truly feared for the effect it might have on Mr. North. Before his walk was over, he decided that it would be infinitely best to hush the scandal up, should that be still possible.

But, for his own satisfaction, he wished to get at the truth. It seemed to him that he could hardly live in the uncertainty. Taking a rapid resolution, he approached Dr. Rane's; knocked at the door, and asked old Phillis if he could see her master.

She at once showed him into the dining-room. Dr. Rane, weary perhaps with the cares of the day, had fallen back in his chair asleep. He sprang up at the interruption: a startled, almost frightened expression appeared in his face. Richard North could but notice it, and his heart failed him, for it seemed to speak of guilt. Phillis shut them in together.

How Richard opened the interview, he scarcely knew, and could never afterwards recall. He soon found that Dr. Rane remained as yet in total ignorance of the stir that was abroad; and this rendered his task all the more difficult. Richard entered on the communication in the most delicate manner that the subject admitted of. Dr. Rane did not receive it kindly. He first swore a great oath, and then—his fury checked suddenly in its midst as if by some latent thought or fear—he sank back in his chair and bent his head on his breast, like a man struck dumb with tribulation.

"I think *you* need not have given credit to this report against me, Richard North," he presently spoke in a reproachful accent. "But I believe you lost confidence in me a year and a half ago."

He so evidently alluded to the anonymous letter that Richard did not affect to misunderstand him. It might be better to speak openly.



"I believe you wrote that, Rane."

"True. I did. But not to injure your brother. I thought Alexander must be a bad man—that he must be leading Edmund North into money difficulties to serve himself. I had no cause to spare him, but the contrary, for he had injured me, was injuring me daily; and I wrote what I did to Mr. North hoping it might expose Alexander and damage him. There: you have it. I would rather have had my hand cut off"—flinging it out with emotion—"than have hurt your brother. I wished afterwards that it had been cut off first. But it was too late then."

And because of that anonymous letter Dr. Rane knew, and Richard felt, that the accusation, now made, gathered weight. When a man has been guilty of one thing, we think it a reason why he may be guilty of another.

A silence ensued. They sat, the table between them. The room was rather dark. The lamp had a shade on it, the fire had burned low; before the large window were stretched the sombre curtains. Richard North would have given some years of his life for this most distressing business never to have come into it.

He went on with what he had to say. Dr. Rane, motionless now, kept his hand over his face while he listened. Richard told of the public commotion; of the unparalleled shock it had been to himself, of the worse shock he feared it might bring his father. Again there was an interruption: but Dr. Rane in speaking did not raise his face.

"Is my personal liberty in danger?"

"Not yet—in one sense. I believe you are under the surveillance of the police."

"Watched by them?"

"Yes. But only to see that you do not get away."

"That is—they track me out and home, I am to understand? I am watched in and out of my patients' houses? If I have occasion to pay country visits, these stealthy bloodhounds are at my heels, night or day?"

"I conclude it is so," answered Richard.

"Since when has this been?"

"Since—I think since the day before yesterday. There is a probability, as I hear, that the Secretary of State will be applied to. If——"

"For what purpose?"

"For his authority to disturb the grave," said Richard, in a low tone. Dr. Rane started up, a frenzy of fear apparent in his face.

"They—they—surely they are not talking of doing *that*?" he cried, turning white as death.

"Yes, they are. To have her disturbed will be to us the most painful of all."



"Stop it, for the Lord's sake!" came the imploring cry. "Stop it, Richard North! Stop it!"

But at that moment there burst upon their ears a frightful clatter outside the door. Richard opened it. Dr. Rane, who had sunk on his seat again, never stirred. Old Phillis, coming in from the scullery after a cleaning bout, had accidentally let fall nearly a small cart-loadful of pots and pans.

## CHAPTER XL.

"EST-CE QU'IL M'AIME?"

WINTRY weather set in again. The past few days had been intensely cold and bleak. Ellen Adair sat in one of her favourite out-door seats. Well sheltered from the wind by artificial rocks and clustering evergreens, and well wrapped-up besides, she did not seem to feel the frost.

Her later days had been one long great trial. Compelled to meet Arthur Bohun perpetually, yet shunned by him as far as it was possible for him to shun her without attracting too much the observation of others, there were times when she felt as though her position at the Hall were killing her. Something, in fact, *was* killing her. Her state of mind was a mixture of despair, shame, and self-reproach. Captain Bohun's conduct brought to her the bitterest humiliation. Looking back on the past, she thought he despised her for her ready acquiescence in that wish of his for a private marriage: and the self-repentance, the humiliation it entailed on her was of all things the hardest to bear. She almost felt that she could die of the memory—just as other poor creatures, whose sin has been different, have died of their shame. To her mistaken vision, it seemed as though the wrong deed she had consented to—the secret marriage—were quite as much of a shame if not of a sin. The view presented perpetually to her mind was, that Captain Bohun so regarded it; and had nothing for her but scorn. This was the thought that tried her, that embittered her peace by night and by day; it was doing her more harm than all the rest. Her cheeks would redden, her fingers tingle with shame as she recalled that fond letter she had written to him from Eastsea, when even then, though she did not know it, he had given her up. To one so sensitively organised as Ellen Adair, reared in all the graces of reticent and refined feeling, this compelled sojourn at Dallory Hall could indeed be nothing less than a fiery ordeal, from which there might be no escape to former health and strength.

A slight scene had taken place between Richard North and Captain Bohun. The latter had seen Richard join Ellen in the garden, and sit with her some time in earnest conversation. Ellen went away; Arthur approached Richard, and dropped into the seat just vacated by Ellen.

"You have been enjoying a confidential chat," he observed.

"Yes," replied Richard. He had not felt very friendly in his heart towards Arthur for some time past. What was the meaning of his changed behaviour to Ellen Adair?—what of the new friendship with Mary Dallory? Richard North could not forgive dishonour; and he believed Arthur Bohun was steeping himself in it to the backbone.

"Were you making love, Dick?"

Richard turned his eyes in silence on the questioner.

"She and I have had to part, Dick. I always thought you admired and esteemed her almost more, perhaps quite more, than you do any other woman. So if you are thinking of her——"

"Be silent," sternly interrupted Richard, rising in anger. "Are you a man?—are you a gentleman? Or are you what I have been thinking you lately—a false-hearted despicable knave?"

Whatever Arthur Bohun might be, he was just then in desperate agitation. Rising, too, he seized Richard's hands.

"Don't you see it was but sorry jesting, Richard? Pretending to a bit of pleasantry with myself, to wile away for a moment my awful weight of torment. I am all that you say of me; and I cannot help myself."

"Not help yourself?"

"As heaven is my witness, no! If I could take you into confidence—and perhaps I may one of these days, for I long to do it—you would see that I tell you truth."

"Why have you parted with Ellen Adair?—she and you *have* parted. You have just said so."

"We have parted for life. For ever."

"You were on the point of marriage with her but a short time back!"

"No two people can be much nearer marriage than she and I were. It was within half an hour of it, Dick; and yet we have parted."

"By your doings, or hers?"

"By mine."

"I thought so."

"I have been *compelled* to it. When you shall know all you will acknowledge that I could not do otherwise. And yet, in spite of this—this compelling power—I feel that to her I have been but a false-hearted knave, as you aptly style me; a despicable, dishonourable man. My father fell into dishonour—or rather had it forced upon him by another—and he could not survive it; he shot himself. Did you know it, Dick?"

"Shot himself!" repeated Richard in his surprise. "No, I never knew that. I thought he died of sunstroke."

"My father shot himself," wailed Arthur. "He could not live dishonoured. Dick, old fellow, there are moments when I feel tempted to do as he did."

"What—because you have parted with Ellen?"

"No. That's bitter enough to bear ; but I can battle with it. It is the other thing, the dishonour. That is always present with me, always haunting me night and day ; I know not how to live under it."

"I do not understand at all," said Richard. "You are master of your own actions."

"In this case I have not been : my line of conduct was forced upon me. I cannot explain. Don't judge me too harshly, my friend. I am bad enough, heaven knows, but not quite as bad, perhaps, as you have been deeming me."

And, wringing the hands he held in a grasp of pain, Arthur Bohun went limping away, leaving Richard lost in wonder.

Richard North had been doing all he could to stop proceedings in connection with the accusation against Dr. Rane, and to allay excitement. Since the night of his interviews with Jelly, Mr. Seeley, and Dr. Rane, Richard had devoted his best energies to the work of suppression. He did not venture to see any official person, the coroner excepted, or impress his views on the magistrates ; but he went about amid the populace, and poured oil on the troubled waters. "For my father's sake, do not press this on," he said to them ; "let my sister's grave rest."

"Just like Dick North," quoth they, one to another. "He was always for peace."

In effect, he said the same to the coroner ; begging of him, if possible, to stop it ; and he implied to all, though not absolutely asserting it, that Dr. Rane could not be guilty. As yet, the strange news had not been allowed to transpire to the chief inmates of Dallery Hall. Richard and Madam alike strove to keep it away. The servants of course knew all, through the public gossip : but they had been warned not to speak. So that Ellen Adair had heard nothing of the dreadful commotion swaying the public.

To return to her, sitting in the garden. Very still she was, nursing her pain. Her face was wan, her breathing short : that past cold she had caught seemed to hang by her strangely. To-day was the day fixed for the departure of Arthur Bohun and Sir Nash. They were to go by the two o'clock train, and it was now mid-day.

A little blue leaf—as it looked—suddenly caught her eye, peeping up from a mossy and tangled green nook, at the foot of the rocks. She rose, and stooped to see. It was a winter violet. Plucking it, she sat down again, and fell into thought.

For it had brought vividly before her memory, that long-past day, when she had played out her play of violets in the garden at Mrs. Cumberland's. "Est-ce qu'il m'aime? Oui. Non. Un peu. Beaucoup. Pas du tout. Passionnément. Il m'aime passionnément." False augurs, those flowers had been? Deceitful blossoms which had combined to mock and sting her. The contrast between that time and this brought

to Ellen Adair a whole flood-tide of intense misery. And those foolish violets were hidden away still ! Should she carry this in-doors and add it to them ?

By-and-by folding her gray shawl closer to her throat, as if she felt the chill there, and coughing a little, she began to walk towards the house. Turning a corner presently she was brought suddenly to the midst of three excited people : Captain Bohun, Miss Dallory, and Matilda North. The two former had met accidentally in the walk. Miss Dallory's morning errand at the Hall was to say good-bye to Sir Nash ; and before she and Captain Bohun had well exchanged greetings, Matilda bore down upon them in a state of agitation, calling wildly to Arthur to stay and hear the tidings *she* had just heard.

The tidings were those that had been so marvellously long kept from her and from others at the Hall—the accusation of Dr. Rane. Matilda North had just learnt them in an accidental manner : in her horror and surprise she had run after her half-brother, Arthur, to repeat the story. Ellen Adair found her talking in wild excitement. Arthur, rather yellow still, was turning to a pale straw-colour as he listened ; Mary Dallory, to whom it was no news, had covered up her face.

But Arthur Bohun and Matilda North were strong enough to bear it without any palpable effect. Ellen Adair was not. As she drank in the meaning of the dreadful words—that Bessy had been murdered—a deadly sickness seized upon her heart ; and she had only time to sit down on a garden bench before she fainted away.

"You should not have told it so abruptly, Matilda," cried Arthur, almost passionately. "It has made even me feel ill. Get some water : you'll go quicker than I should."

Alarmed at Ellen's state, and eager to be of service, both Matilda and Miss Dallory ran in search of the water. Arthur Bohun sat down on the bench to support her. His path in life was to lie that way, and hers this, the further apart the better ; but he could not in humanity—no, nor in love either—walk away now and leave her to recover alone as she best could.

Her head lay on his breast, as he placed it. She was entirely without consciousness : he saw that. His arm encircled her waist ; he took one of her lifeless hands between his, to rub it. Thus he sat, gazing down at the pale thin face so near to his ; the face which he—he—had helped to rob of its bloom.

Oh, but he loved her still ! loved her better than he did all the rest of the world put together ! Holding her there to his beating heart, he knew it. He knew that he only loved her the more truly for their bitter estrangement. His frame was trembling, his pulses were thrilling with the rapture this momentary contact brought him. If he might but embrace her, as of old ! Should he ? Why not ? No human soul, save himself, would ever know it. A strangely irrepressible yearning,

to touch her lips with his, came into his eyes and heart. Glancing keenly around first, lest any prying eyes should be in ambush, he slightly lifted the pale sweet face, and bent down his own.

"Oh, my darling! My lost darling!"

Lips, cheeks, brow were kissed again and again, with a soft impassioned tenderness, with a kind of hungry rapture. It was so long since he had touched them! Was he ever going to leave off? A sigh—more than one—escaped him; a little sound of irrepressible emotion: and he knew not whether it contained most of bliss or of agony.

This treatment was quite effective; more so than the water could have been. Ellen drew a deep breath, and stirred uneasily. As soon as she began really to revive, he managed to get his coat off and fold it across the head and arm of the bench. When Ellen awoke to consciousness, she had her head leaning on it; and Captain Bohun stood at a very respectful distance, gingerly chafing one of her hands. Never a suspicion crossed her mind of what he had been doing.

"You are better?" he said, "I am so glad!"

The words, in *his* voice, aroused her fully. She lifted her head and opened her eyes, and gazed around her in bewilderment, at first remembering nothing. But what Matilda had said came back with a rush.

"Is it true?" she exclaimed, looking piteously at him. "It never can be true!"

"I don't know," he answered. "If false, it is almost as dreadful to us who hear it. Poor Bessy! I loved her as my very dear sister."

Ellen, exhausted by the fainting fit, her nerves unstrung by the news, burst into a flood of distressing tears. Matilda and Miss Dallory running up with water, wine, and smelling-salt, found her sobbing aloud.

"It is the reaction after the faintness," said Captain Bohun to them, in a whisper.

But she soon recovered her equanimity, so far as outward calmness went, without the aid of any of the remedies—which she declined. Rising from the bench, she turned towards the house. Her steps tottered a little.

"Do give your arm to support Miss Adair, Captain Bohun," spoke Mary Dallory, in a sharp, quick tone, surprised perhaps that he did not.

And upon that, Captain Bohun went to Ellen's side, and held it out.

"Thank you," she answered, and refused it with a slight movement of the head.

They walked on at first all in a group, as it were. But Matilda and Miss Dallory got far ahead, the former talking in a most excited state about Bessy Rane and the miserable accusation in regard to her. Ellen's steps were slower, which she could not help; and Captain Bohun kept by her side.

"May I wish you good-bye here, Ellen?" he suddenly asked, stop-



ping towards the end of the shrubbery, through which they had been passing.

"Good-bye," she faintly answered.

He took her hand. That is, he held out his own, and Ellen almost mechanically put hers into it. To have made a to-do, by refusing, would have hurt her pride worse than all. He kept it within his, clasping his other hand upon it. For a moment his eyes met hers.

"It may be, that we shall never again cross each other's path in life, Ellen. God bless you, my love, and keep you always! I wish to heaven, for both our sakes, that we had never met!"

"Good-bye," she coldly repeated, as he dropped her hand. And they walked on in silence and gained the lawn, where the two in advance had turned to wait for them.

But this was destined to be an eventful day: to others, at least, if not to them. At the appointed time, Sir Nash Bohun and Arthur took their departure; Richard North, who had paid the baronet the attention of coming home to luncheon—for there was no concealment now as to who was the true host at Dallory Hall—seeing them into their carriage.

"You have promised to come and stay with me, Richard," said the baronet, at the last hand-shake.

"Conditionally. When my work shall allow me leisure," answered Richard, laughing.

"Can't you go with us to the station, Dick?" put in Arthur.

"Not to-day, I fear. I must hold an immediate interview with Madam—something important. If you waited for me you might lose the train."

Arthur bent his face—one of pain now—close to Dick's, and whispered.

"Is it money-trouble again, Richard?"

"No; not this time."

"If she brings *that* on you in future, turn her over to me. Yes, Richard: I must deal with it now."

Farewells were exchanged, and the carriage drove away. Richard, stepping backwards, trod on Miss Dallory.

"I beg your pardon!" he exclaimed. "Have I hurt you? I did not know you were there."

"Of course you have not hurt me: and I had no business to be there. I stood to wave my handkerchief to them. Good afternoon, Mr. Richard."

"Are you going?" he asked.

"I am engaged to spend the afternoon and take tea with Mrs. Gass. That luncheon was my dinner. I saw you looking at me as if you thought I ate a great deal."

"Miss Dallory!"

She laughed slightly.



"To confess the truth, I don't think I noticed whether you ate anything or nothing," said Richard. "I have a great deal of trouble on my mind just now—of more kinds than one. Good afternoon."

He would be returning to Dallory himself in perhaps a few minutes, but he never said to her, "Stay, and I will walk with you." Miss Dallory thought of it as she went away. It had indeed crossed Richard's mind to say so : but he arrested the words as they were about to leave his lips. If she was to be Arthur Bohun's wife, the less Richard saw of her the better.

Inquiring for Madam when he went indoors, he found she was ensconced in her boudoir. Richard went up, knocked at the door, and opened it. Madam appeared not to approve of the procedure ; she bore down on him with a swoop, and would have shut him out.

"What do you want here, Richard North ? I am not at liberty. I cannot admit you."

"Pardon me, Madam, I must speak with you for five minutes," he answered, passing quietly in.

By something he had heard that morning from Dale, Richard had reason to suppose that Mrs. North was still actively pursuing the charge against Dr. Rane ; that is, was urging in high quarters the imperative necessity for an investigation. Richard had come to ask her whether this was the case, and to beg her, once for all, to be still. He sat down uninvited while he put the question.

But Madam acknowledged nothing. In fact, she led him to believe that it was entirely untrue : that she had not stirred in it at all since the caution Richard had given her, not to, some days ago. It was simply impossible for him to know whether what she said might be depended on—for she told more falsehood than truth habitually. Richard could only hope.

"It would be a terrible exposure for us," he urged. "Madam, I beg you ; I beg you for all our sakes, be *still*. You know not what you would do."

She nodded an ungracious acquiescence : and Richard departed for his works, casually mentioning to Mr. North, as he passed him in the garden, that he should not be home until night. Like Miss Dallory, he had intended the mid-day meal to serve for his dinner.

"Dick," cried Mr. North, arresting him, "what's the matter with Matilda ? She seems to be in a fine commotion over something or other."

Richard knew not what to answer. If his father had to be told, why, better that he himself should be the teller. There was still a chance that it might be kept from him.

"Something or other gone wrong, I suppose, sir. Never mind. How well those new borders look !"

"Don't they, Dick ! I'm glad I had them put."

And Richard went on to his works.

## CHAPTER XLI.

## A FINE NIGHT'S WORK.

NIGHT had fallen. And it was not a bright or pleasant one.

Some few skulkers had gathered behind the dwarf hedge, that skirted the piece of waste land near the North Works. An ill-looking lot of men, seen as at present: for they had knelt down so as to bring themselves nearly on a level with the top of the hedge. Their eyes just cleared it, and the view beyond was not interrupted. Poole was in the middle; his face sternly savage, and a pistol in his right hand.

Of all the men who had returned to work, the most obnoxious to the ex-hands was one named Ralley. It was not so much because he had been a turn-coat—that is, after holding out to the eleventh moment, had finally gone back at the twelfth—that the men hated him, as because they believed him to be treacherous. Ralley had been red-hot for the strike; had done more by his agitation than any one man to bring it about. He had resolutely refused all the overtures made by Richard North: and yet—he had gone back when the works were finally re-opened. For this the men heartily despised him—far more than they did those who had been ready to go back all along. In addition to this, they had been suspecting—and lately had felt sure—that he was a snake in the grass. That he had laid himself out to pick up, fairly or stealthily, as might be, bits of information about them, their doings and sayings, their miserable condition, and threats of revenge, and carried them to the works and to Richard North. And so—the contents of this pistol, that Poole held in his hand, were meant for Ralley.

For a long time the malcontents of North Inlet had been burning to take vengeance on somebody: some new treachery on Ralley's part, or suspected treachery, had come to light, and they determined to shoot him. Oh, poor, misguided, foolish men! As if it would make things better for them! Suppose they killed Ralley, how would it ease their condition! Ralley had not suffered half what they suffered. He was an unmarried man: and, during the strike, he had been helped by his relatives, who were pretty well off, so that he had known neither starvation nor rags, as they had: and this made his returning to work look all the worse in their eyes. Ralley was about the age of Richard North, and not unlike him in height and figure; so much like him, indeed, that since their evil act had been determined on, one of the others had bade Poole take care he did not mistake the master for him. Poole's sullen rejoinder was, that 'twould not much matter if he did.

The night was dark; a drizzling rain had come on, and that part was not too well lighted. The small band, about to issue from the gates of the works, would come down by this waste land and pass within some

fifteen yards of them. Poole had been a famous marksman in his day, and felt sure of his aim. John Allen knelt at his right hand, one Denton at the other; another beyond on either side: five in all.

Five o'clock struck. Almost simultaneously with it was heard the bell at the works, giving token that it was time for the men to go to tea. Three or four sharp, quick strokes: nothing more.

"That's Green, I'll swear," cried Denton, alluding to the ringer. "I didn't know he was back again: his rheumatics must be better."

"Hush—sh—sh!" was all Denton got. And there ensued a death-like silence. Not for long. Poole broke it.

"Where the devil are they?—why don't they come?"

Ay, why did they not come? Simply because there had been scarcely sufficient time for it. But every moment, to these would-be murderers, kneeling there, seemed like a long drawn-out period.

"Here they be," whispered Denton.

It was so. The men were coming out at the gate, about twenty of them; two and two: the policemen to-night heading the string. At times the officers were behind it, at other times on either side. Poole rose cautiously and prepared to take aim. They were coming across from the gates at a kind of right angle, and presently would pass the hedge, side-ways. This was the second night the men had thus lain in ambush. The previous one they had alike waited: but Ralley happened to be then on the other side his companion in the march, and so for the time was saved.

Allen stretched his head up. His sight was as keen as a sailor's.

"Which side's he on, Jack?" whispered Poole. "I don't see him yet."

For answer John Allen put his hand quickly on Poole's arm to lower the pistol. "No good again, mates," said he. "Ralley ain't there."

"Not there!" retorted Poole, with a vile oath.

"I'm as nigh sure as I can be of it," said Allen. "Wait till they come nearer."

It proved to be so. Ralley for some cause or other was not with the men.

"Rat him!" cried Denton furiously.

Tramp, tramp, tramp: their tread sounded regular in the stillness of the night as they passed, the policemen throwing their eyes on all sides. Poole had crouched down again. He and his companions in evil kept very still: it would not do to let either movement be seen, or noise be heard.

The steps died away in the distance, and the conspirators ventured to raise their heads. Allen happened to look in the direction of the gates.

"By Jorkins, here he is!" burst forth Allen, almost with a scream.

"Something kept him back. Now's our time, mates. Here's Ralley."

"That ain't his hat, Jack Allen," dissented one.

"Hat be smothered, it's *him*," said John Allen.

Ralley was coming on very quickly, a dark, low-crowned hat drawn down on his brows. A minute's silence, during which you might have heard their hearts beat, and then—

Poole fired. Ralley gave a cry, staggered, and walked on. He was struck, no doubt, but not killed.

"Your boasted aim has failed, Poole," cried Denton, with a savage oath.

Not more savage than Poole's, though, as he burst through, or over the low hedge. What the bullet had not done, the pistol itself should. Suddenly, with a shriek and a cry, Allen burst after him, shouting to him to stay his hand.

"It's the master, Poole; it's not Ralley. Stop, you fool!—it's the master."

Too late. It was indeed Richard North. And Mr. Poole had felled him by a wicked blow on the temple.

Mrs. Gass and Mary Dallory were seated at tea in a subdued mood—for the conversation had turned on those dreadful rumours that, in spite of Richard North, could not be hushed, but on the contrary were growing worse hourly. Stoutly was Mrs. Gass asserting that she had more faith in Dr. Rane than to believe them, when some commotion dawned on their ears from the street. Mrs. Gass stopped in the midst of a sentence.

"What's that?" she cried.

Fleet steps seemed to be running hither and thither; voices were raised in excitement. They distinctly heard the words, "Mr. Richard," "Richard North." Mrs. Gass drew aside her crimson curtains, and opened the window.

"Here—is it you, Smith?" she said, arresting a man who was running in the wake of others. "What is it? What's up?"

"I don't rightly know, ma'am," he answered. "They are saying that Mr. Richard North has been shot dead."

"Lord help us!" cried Mrs. Gass. She shut down the window and brought her face round to the light again. Every bit of colour had gone out of it. Mary Dallory stood rigidly upright, her hands clasped, still as one who has been turned into stone.

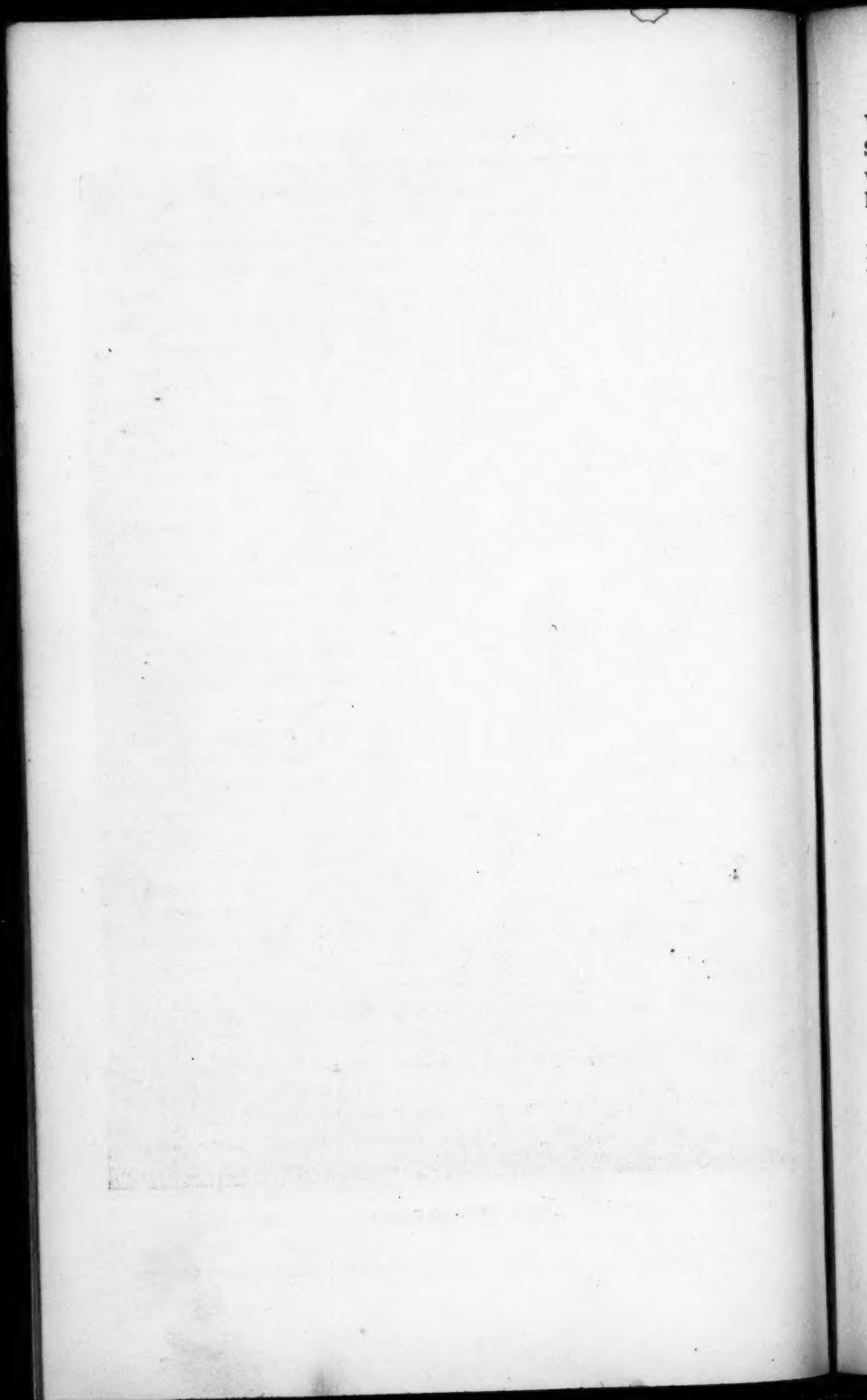
"Did you hear what he said, child?"

"I heard," was the scarcely-spoken answer that the lips formed.

Mrs. Gass caught up a bonnet which happened to lie on a chair, tilted it on her head, and went into the street. At the entrance to North Inlet a crowd was gathered, men and women. As in all such cases, reports varied. Some said it had taken place in the high road to



"Now's our time, mates."





Whitborough, some said at the works, some said near Dallory Hall. So the mob was puzzled which way to go and not miss the sight. Thoms was talking at the top of his voice as Mrs. Gass got up; anxious, perhaps, to disclaim complicity on his own score.

"They've had it in their heads to do it, some o' them bad uns have. I could name names, but I won't. If the master had know'd all, he'd ha' went about in fear of his life this long while past."

This was enough for Mrs. Gass. Gathering her black silk skirts in her hands that they should not trail in the mud, her bonnet lodged sideways, and her face paler than the assemblage had ever seen it, she stood, unmindful of the rain, and told them what she thought.

"If you've shot Richard North, you have shot the best and bravest man you'll ever know in this life. You'll never find such a friend again. Oh, he was brave! Brave to do good in the midst o' difficulties, brave to forbear. Don't *you* boast, Thoms, with your glib tongue. None of you men round me now may be the one that's shot him, but you've been all rowing in the same boat. Yes, you have. You mayn't have planned out murder yourselves—I'd not answer for it that you've not—but, any way, you knowed that others was a-planning it, and you winked at it and held your tongues. Who has been the friend to you that Richard North has? Since you've been part starving and your wives and children's been part starving, where has all the help come from, d'ye suppose, that has kept you from starving quite? Why, from him. The most of it has come from him. The money I gave was his, the things I bought was mostly paid for by him. A little of it came from me, not much; I was too angry with your folly; but he couldn't see you quite clam, and he took care you shouldn't. Look at how you were all helped through the fever; and meat, and bread, and beer gave to you to get up your strength a bit, after it! Who did all that? Why, Richard North. You thought it was me; but it was him only he wouldn't have it known. That was his return for all the black ingratitude you'd showed, in refusing to work for him and bringing him to ruin. Pray God he may not be dead! but if he is, there's a good man gone to his reward. Is that you, Ketlar?"

"Yes, it's me," answered Ketlar, who was standing in the shadow, a worse gloom on his face than the night cast.

"When that child of yourn died, Cissy—and many a little help did she get in life from him—who took care that she shouldn't be buried by the parish but Richard North? He met Fanny Jelly, and he put some money into her hand, and charged her to let it be thought it was *hers*. 'They are in great distress, I know, Jelly,' he said; 'let this be used in any way that's best for them.' Go and ask Jelly, if you don't believe me; I had it from her. And that's the master you've been conspirating together to help to kill, Ketlar!"

Ketlar swallowed down a rising sob. "I'd never have raised a hand

again' the master; no, nor countenanced it. If anybody has said I would, it's a lie."

"There's not one of you but knew what mischief was in the wind, or might have knew it; and you've countenanced it by keeping silence," retorted Mrs. Gass. "You are a pack of cowards. First of all you ruin him by throwing up his work, and when you find yourselves all clamming together, or nigh upon it, you turn round on him and kill him. May the Lord forgive you! I never will."

Some disturbance. A tramping of feet, and a shouting of running boys. Mrs. Gass was pushed aside with others to make way for the cause of interruption passing. Poole, Denton, John Allen, and one more were marching by in handcuffs, marshalled by some policemen. A telling hiss greeted them.

"'Twas a mistake," said Jack Allen, in answer to the hiss, reckless under his untoward fate. "'Twas meant for Ralley, not for the master."

"Is he dead?" called out Mrs. Gass.

But amidst the confusion she got no answer. And at that moment she became aware of a pale countenance near her, peeping out from a muffling of wool.

"Good gracious, Mary, child! You shouldn't be out here."

"I have been with you all the while."

"Then, my dear, you just betake yourself home again. I'll come in as soon as I can learn the truth, and where he is."

Mrs. Gass had not long to wait. Almost as she spoke, Richard North appeared; and thereupon ensued more excitement than ever. Blood was trickling from his temple, but he appeared quite sensible, and was walking slowly, helped by two men.

"Thank God!" said Mrs. Gass aloud; and the words were heartily echoed. "To my house, men. Mr. Richard, sir, it is but a few steps more, and we'll soon get the doctor. A fine night's work, this is!" she concluded, not speaking in reference to the weather, but to the "work."

Little Barrington, the druggist, came out of his shop, and helped to put Richard on Mrs. Gass's sofa. They got his coat off. The left arm was injured, as well as the temple. Barrington staunched the blood, trickling from the latter; but the arm he preferred not to meddle with. "He had better be kept quiet until the surgeon comes," said the druggist to Mrs. Gass.

Mrs. Gass cleared the room. About fifty excited messengers had run to the Ham for Mr. Seeley or Dr. Rane, or both if they should be found at home. She stood at the front door, looking out and waiting.

Richard North, three parts in a faint, lay with his eyes closed. Opening them in the still room, he saw Mary Dallory kneeling by the sofa, pale and sad. He smiled faintly, and her tears began to drop.

"Don't be alarmed," he whispered. "It might have been worse."

"I would have given my life to save yours, Richard," she impetuously exclaimed in the delirium of the moment. And, leaning forward, the tears fell now on his face.

His right hand went out a little and hers met it.

"Richard, I wish I might stay and nurse you. You have no sister," she added, as an after-thought. "Matilda is useless in a sick-room."

Richard North nervously pressed her fingers. "Don't try me too much, Mary. I am caring for you already more than is good for my peace. Don't tempt me."

"And if I were to tempt you?—Though I don't quite take the meaning," she replied, softly and nervously. "What then?"

"I might say what I ought not." And there he paused.

"It would make it all the harder for me," he continued. "I am a man of the people; a man of work. You will belong to one—one of a different order."

She knew he alluded to Arthur Bohun, and laughed slightly. But, though she said no more, she left her hand in his, their fingers entwining together. Richard thought it was done solely in compassion.

And now there was a bustle heard, and in came Mr. Seeley, his face hot with running. The hands parted, and Mary Dallery went round to the other side of the table, standing there in decorum.

*(To be concluded.)*



## WOMAN'S WORK.

IN order that what we are going to say may have some chance of getting a hearing, we must begin by stating that we are no modern Griselda, who would preach to woman that her only proper place is at the feet of man, where she is to be caressed and kicked by turns. Far from that, we take our stand upon very high ground indeed when we speak of our sex. We think that no man is to be regarded so much an enemy to the human race as he who holds that woman's only use in this world is to be looked at and played with. We think that no man is to be so much despised for his utter littleness of mind as he who would confine woman's activity exclusively to the kitchen and the nursery. Whenever a gentleman of this latter type comes to make an offer of marriage to a high-spirited young lady, we should recommend her to answer him by directing him to the nearest servants' repository. There he may count upon finding a cook and a mother for his children, who is quite sure to be good enough for him, and perhaps a little too good. Woman's place in creation is most decidedly quite as high as that of man.

But, as a rule, the generality of women differ greatly from the generality of men in the qualities both of their minds and their characters. Let not the susceptible pride of the sex fire up at our laying down this rule. To say that one thing differs from another does not imply the slightest thought of inferiority. Besides, we do not gain-say the truth of there being exceptions to such a rule. There are, no doubt, some women who display, in a certain degree, a masculine element in their characters, just as there are some men who display in their characters a feminine element. But it is not with these exceptional cases that we now have to do.

Allowed, then, that woman, though standing quite as high as man in the world's vast commonwealth, essentially differs from him. This being so, she ought to have some spheres of usefulness which are peculiarly her own. The chief error committed by clever women of this day, who stand forward as champions for the rights of their sex, is, that they want too much to trespass on man's field of labour instead of trying to find a field for themselves. By so doing, they, in our opinion, damage their cause, and only awaken bad feelings of strife and rivalry in both sexes. Why should woman think it impossible to hold her head quite as high as man holds his, and yet not to clash with him in her work? Surely there is nothing derogatory to dignity in having separate departments in the world's workshop, where all are striv-

ing to please one great Master, and to do good to one great human family?

If called upon to point out in what way the intellectual powers of women differ from those of men, we should say that, in general, those of the latter are more remarkable for strength and solidity, and those of the former for fineness and quickness. To begin, then, with literary work.

Women will commonly make better novelists than historians. Their sharp insight into character, their delicate perception of every shade of feeling in others, their rapid flight of imagination, all make them produce good fiction. On the other hand, neither their brains nor their tempers would bear well the slow weighing of events, the patient sifting of facts, the careful stirring among forgotten rubbish in Time's lumber-closets to find one grain of truth; all of which are necessary to make a reliable history. Let it not be thought, however, from what we have said about women writing novels, that we mean to encourage vain, romantic, young ladies to take up the pen of the authoress. May Heaven avert any such consequences from following our words! But we have said something on this point in a former paper, and we will not harp again upon the same string. As novelists, women will generally do much better work in trying to paint what they, as women, really know, than in apeing the tone of men. What female novelist was ever so truly womanly in her writings as Jane Austen? and yet what female novelist has taken so high a place as she? Is not one chapter, filled with her delicate wit and nice reading of character, worth more than the whole three volumes overflowing with slang and flippant pertness which fast young ladies of the present day both write and read with such charming ease? Women may also do useful literary work by writing shrewd practical papers on subjects of the day which require brisk matter-of-fact treatment. Woman is usually more practical than man. While he is theorizing, she is often acting. Let a sensible woman take into her kingdom of thought some obscure or vexed question. Let her bring to bear upon it the keen edge of her own quick intelligence. Then let her write down simply and earnestly what she has been thinking, and the result will commonly be some ray of fresh light.

Preaching and public speaking in large assemblies is decidedly not woman's work. We once sat in a crowded room where a fair young girl stood in the midst as a preacher. Let it not be supposed for a moment that we mean to speak any scornful, mocking words concerning that gentle girl being unsexed either in look or attitude. The word lady was written as plainly in her simple black dress as in the glistening silks and flashing jewels of a Belgravian drawing-room. Her whole soul, too, was in her words. She believed that her Lord had given her a message to deliver, and she was telling it to the people. But the slender form shook painfully with the laboured effort of doing what was



beyond its strength; the sweet voice was strained into harsh cadences and hoarse screaming; the muscles in the tender neck swelled as though the soft skin would burst with the violent exertion. As we marked these things, we said to ourselves this is surely not woman's work.

If, however, a woman wishes to be a religious teacher, it is in her power to do quite as much good as any preacher that ever opened his mouth. It is woman's work to read and to pray beside the sick and aged. It is woman's work to sit among the little children, and tell them, in language simpler and more child-like than even that of the holy Bible itself, the beautiful old Scripture stories. It is woman's work to collect around her the worn, struggling wives of labourers and mechanics, and to bid them turn aside from the hot, dusty high-road of life to rest for a moment in the shadow of the Rock of Ages. It is woman's work on Sunday mornings and evenings to call into the comfortable, well-appointed room, the young men and lads who are idling at the corner of the village, or under the archway of the town, and to declare to them the true meaning and use of the Sabbath. It is woman's work to be busy about those women's hearts which, crushed by shame and hard unkindness, and hideously wounded by sin, can bear no handling less tender than that of a sister's touch if ever they are to be healed. If the ladies who now are filling our social atmosphere with such frantic shrieks about woman's rights would cease the din they are making, and gain some solid respect for their sex by doing works of this sort, they would stand a much better chance of leaving their mark upon their generation. We can assure these Amazons that when they have done all such works as these, it will be quite time enough to indulge in vague longings, and grand declamation, the offspring of thinskin vanity.

When, a little while ago, women sought to be admitted to medical lecture-rooms in common with men, they were guilty of a very wrong and very foolish thing. By so doing, they pulled out with their own hands the first stone in that wall of decent reverence with which in all Christian times men have surrounded the female sex. If, however, a woman's mind has a real turn in that direction, and if she seriously wishes to make medicine her walk in life, we think that it is hard if she may not follow her bent. Besides, it is a great loss to the whole community that woman's quickness of perception and delicacy of touch, which are confessedly of such use in a sick-room, should not be cultivated for that especial purpose when she has a gift that way. It would often be a great blessing to the sick, and more particularly to the sick among the poor, if the nurses who attended them possessed some definite knowledge of medicine. In retired country districts the doctor is a luxury which only the wealthiest can indulge in frequently. In crowded towns the parish doctor, however active and kind he may be, can only give a very small fraction of his time to each of his pauper

patients individually. We should therefore like to see our great medical professors often holding lectures exclusively for women. We should like to see all women who have a real talent in that direction, and who, having counted the cost, have resolved earnestly to devote themselves to such arduous work, attending these lectures, passing examinations, and receiving certificates of relative merit. We should like this band of educated and certificated nurses to be spread abroad through the land, and we believe the saving of many lives would be the result.

Some of those women who belong to the lower ranks of society might be employed in chemists' shops, where they could surely make themselves quite as useful as men do. The large mass of our female population might, we think, find employment as accountants and clerks in our government offices and mercantile houses. They are often very quick arithmeticians, and they would do their work with speed and neatness. They must, of course, have separate rooms from the men in which to work, and competent persons must be appointed to watch over their comfort and respectability. If such work as this was accessible to women, perhaps many a girl who has been driven by sheer poverty into vice would be saved.

It is well known that there exists an invincible dislike to domestic service among a vast number of young women of the lower classes in our large towns. Sewing machines have lately made the needle-woman's trade (that chief refuge of girls in search of a livelihood), a much more precarious one than formerly. It is, therefore, most necessary that, if possible, new fields should be opened of respectable female work.

Music and painting are professions which are so generally allowed to be quite as much open to women as to men, that we need not dwell upon them. Woman's natural taste for beauty and her delicate feeling make her peculiarly qualified to excel in these arts; and they may be considered as most fitting woman's work. It is pleasant to see, as we walk through our public exhibitions of pictures, how many female art-students crowd them. We are glad to think that the present set in the tide of general feeling makes good society every day more accessible to those women who have made music, or art, or literature their profession. People are beginning to understand that to be a lady it is not imperatively necessary to sit all day in a drawing-room doing embroidery.

To make the world pretty, is most emphatically woman's work; and this is a work to which women of even ordinary capacity and limited spheres may, in some measure, contribute. To dress well, and to arrange tastefully a room or a dinner-table, may seem at first sight but trifling things; and, no doubt, any so-called strong-minded female, who may condescend to cast her eyes upon this page, will toss her majestic head very high indeed to hear us say that to attend to these small pretti-

nesses of life is one of woman's chief duties. But let these ladies only think for a moment what a gloomy place this world would be had Almighty Wisdom been of their mind at the earth's birthday! In that case, the flowers, and the birds, and the bright insects would have been left out of the creation altogether. To arrange a nosegay, to blend harmoniously the tints of curtains at the window and papers on the wall, or dispose the bright colours in a flower-bed, each of these may seem only a slight thing in itself. But it must be remembered that all of these trifles work as a whole upon the people who live daily among them; and the home which is thus daintily cared for by its mistress cannot fail of having a humanizing and softening influence upon its inhabitants.

Then, what a blessing in a small way to society is the woman who dresses really well! How does the graceful flow of her drapery, the nice mingling of tints in gay ribbon and delicate silk gladden the eye, and even soothe the irritable nerves, of her neighbour at the weary dinner-table, or in the sultry ball-room!

A great hindrance to women excelling in what they undertake is that they much oftener try to do many things tolerably than one thing well. We should recommend those women who wish to distinguish themselves in art, or literature, or to devote themselves to religious teaching, or tending the sick, really to make whichever of these objects is their choice their profession. That is the only way in which they will ever gain any important position in the world, or do any important good. We believe that the woman who thus dedicates herself to any great work is much better and happier leading a single life. Marriage is in itself a profession for a woman. She cannot follow any other at the same time with it, without neglecting her duty. There are, of course, exceptional cases, such as when the husband, from misconduct will not, or from physical infirmity cannot, support his family, in which a woman does well and nobly to work for her children's bread. But, in general, a wife and mother is best without any specific work, except her household and maternal business. When two human beings agree to spend their lives together, as a man and a woman do in matrimony, both expediency and comfort point out that there should be a division of labour between them. The husband's work is to earn the money for the family, and the wife's work is to spend this money in the best way for the household. When children come into the home, the wife's place in the house then grows really far more important than that of the husband. With her lies almost entirely, for at least several years, the whole training and educating of her sons and daughters.

At the beginning of this paper we spoke with dislike and contempt of those men who would confine woman's sphere of work exclusively to the kitchen and the nursery. We did not, however, at all intend to encourage wives and mothers in neglect of their duties. We only

meant to censure those men very strongly who regard women merely as an upper kind of inferior animal, who was created simply for their use and pleasure. Attention to cookery, and the comfort and cleanliness of her house, and the bringing up of her children, are, we think, the chief work of a wife. We do not say that all women ought to marry. Far from that; we should be glad to see more single women standing alone in some profession or vocation. But what we say is, that she who links her fate to that of a husband is bound to bear her part of the matrimonial burden. We cannot understand why a lady should any more think it beneath her dignity to be familiar with the concerns of her kitchen than a gentleman thinks it beneath his to be familiar with the concerns of his stable and garden.

As for the work of training and teaching her children, which falls to every mother, it ought to be the delight and pride of her life. There can be no higher object than to bring up reasoning beings for goodness and greatness in this world and the next. That is the mother's work. She who has no taste for it must not marry.

We have spoken thus strongly about the difference between the work of a single and a married woman because we think that that difference is not felt and understood enough by girls of the present day. We believe that if young women could learn that there are other walks in life for their sex besides matrimony, much domestic misery would be prevented; and both married and single women, from being more contented with their work in this life, would look with a brighter and calmer faith towards the time when there shall be no marrying or giving in marriage, but all shall be as the angels of God.

ALICE KING.



## ANNETTE'S LOVE-STORY.

BY JULIA KAVANAGH.

## CHAPTER I.

DEEP in the heart of Normandy lies Manneville, and very green and quiet it is, as a true Norman village should be. It is pretty too, and is both picturesque and homely. Its one street, with gray stone houses and tiled roofs brown with age, climb up a low hill with a straggling, halting ascent; just as if, though glad to rest by the way, it were also very anxious to reach the little Gothic church perched on the top, and thence have a look down below into the pleasant valley where the little shining river glides through the orchards which replace the vineyards in Western France.

Manneville is very old, says tradition. It was Celtic once, asserts that venerable authority; then it became strongly Norman; then devoutly Christian, raising three churches for its own use; then it dozed for a few centuries, during which two of the churches decayed and became picturesque ruins. When Manneville awoke one morning from this long sleep, it was to cry out, "Vive la République," and send forth a few boyish conscripts, who began by fighting for the rights of man and who ended by giving their young blood to make an Emperor and found a dynasty.

In these days the *cavées* were, as they are still,—for Manneville is alive and well, thank heaven—one of the chief features and great attractions of this little place. A *cavée* in Normandy is a long, winding road, cut through the country, and lying several feet deep beneath its level. It is not imperial; no telegraphic wires follow its course, no diligence wheels speed along its uneven soil. A *cavée* is never traced in a map, or recorded in a chronicle, but for all that a *cavée* is a lovely thing. It is winding, and as you rarely see for more than forty yards before you, it looks endless. Sometimes its green banks are merely clothed with furze, tall grasses, and a world of lovely wild flowers, whilst field after field of yellow corn looks down from above, and the lark sings far away in the blue sky. This is the sunny *cavée*, delightful in the early morning or towards evening time; pleasant too, when its high banks shelter you from the keen north-easterly wind in spring or in autumn, but intolerable in the hot glare of noonday and summer sun. Such sunny *cavées* Manneville has in plenty; it also abounds in specimens of the cool and shady *cavée*, the most beautiful and sequestered of which bears the name of *Cavée de la Dame*. Tradition, which has kept



the name, has forgotten to give it a meaning. This Lady's Cavée is a deep, dark, winding path, lovely and mysterious, a spot much frequented by blackbirds and lovers in spring. Trees grow on either of its steep banks, and they are ages old, says tradition. Time has worn away the earth from their gnarled roots, and their broad heavy branches meet close above, and shut out sunshine and sky.

Yet there is light in this place—a cool, green light—delicious contrast to the glare without; light by which you can see your way, and the tall ferns, and luxuriant ivy, and deep golden moss that clothe the banks on either hand, and add to the sylvan look of the old cavée. Here, on a bright May morning, forty odd years ago, Annette came to meet her lover. The day was warm, Annette had walked fast, and Jean had not come yet, so she sat down to rest, and looked up the path with eager eyes and a beating heart. There is little joy in the lot of a servant girl on a Norman farm. Love is much to her, and a meeting in the cavée with her lover has more of the flavour of lost Paradise than to many another young woman of her years. Annette was an orphan; she worked hard, rose early, went to bed late, and had but that one bit of pure, true sunshine in her life, her love for a young man as poor as herself—he was but a plough-boy, and he lived miles away—whom she saw rarely, and of whom she thought night and day, noon and morning.

Annette was poor, but she was very handsome—a grand young creature of eighteen, a noble specimen of rich peasant blood. She had dark hair and darker eyes, a laughing mouth, a stately carriage, and a fond, warm heart. No sooner did she now see a stalwart young peasant in a blue blouse slowly coming down the path, than she rose and sprang towards him, ardent, joyous, and free.

"Laggard!" she cried, "laggard! I have been here this hour."

But Jean gazed at her with a troubled mien, and there was no response to her fond reproaches in his white face and sunken blue eyes.

"I am going," he said.

"When?" asked Annette, from whose brown cheeks the rich warm blood had suddenly fled.

"In an hour."

Annette said not a word, but sank down, like one stunned, at the root of a tree. Jean sat down by her. He, too, was silent, and leaning his two elbows on his knees, and his cheeks on the palms of his hands, he stared moodily before him.

These were the palmy days of the First Napoleon's reign, days of mighty battles and great victories. But Manneville, which had liked the excitement of the thing at first, had got tired of it with time, and was now utterly sick of its yearly contributions to glory in the shape of taxes and men. From the moment that Jean had put his hand in the fatal urn and drawn forth the number that doomed him to go, he had hated his lot; and now that his hour had come, now that he must leave the

old aunt who had reared him, and who, without him, might starve and die; the handsome girl who loved him, and who gave his life its one bit of gladness; now that he must exchange field labour for fighting, and green and cool Normandy for hot battle-fields in parched countries, or forced marches in frozen lands, Jean hated it ten times more, with the sullen despondent hatred of a man who knows that he is powerless against his fate.

Annette was the first to rally from the blow. She raised her bowed head. She looked around her. Through a gap in the foliage a bright sunbeam stole in, and a linnet, perched on a bough above her head, was singing gaily its little roundelay. How could there be abiding grief or trouble with that bright sun and that cheerful little songster? Jean must go, of course he must, but then of course too he must come back. All would be well, oh! so well yet.

"Cheer up," she said, with a tear in her eye and a smile on her lip; "cheer up, all will be well yet."

But if the liberty, if the joy and hopeful life of Nature were the gifts which daily communion with her had bestowed upon Annette, very different had been Nature's meaning to Annette's lover. He had seen her ploughed, conquered, and plundered by man, and as her lot was, so did his seem to be. In vain his fair hair, blue eyes, and aquiline features, proclaimed his Scandinavian descent; Jean, having left off piracy, and riding the waves, and calling on Odin and Walhalla, in order to till the soil, wear a blue blouse, and utter forbidden oaths between his teeth when anything vexed him, had allowed the servile yoke of his latter ancestors to enter his very soul, not in resignation, but in sullen submission. What avails strife when defeat is sure to be the end? What is the use of listening to Hope when you know that her promises are all false lures?

"Cheer up!" he echoed, with something like a sneer; "and who will take care of my Aunt Denise when I am gone?"

"I will," answered Annette stoutly. "I know she never liked that we should marry, but what matter? She is thy aunt, she reared thee, and every sou I earn I will share with her. Ay, and she shall tell thee so when thou comest back."

"When I come back!" interrupted Jean, with a loud and bitter laugh; "come back indeed! why, I shall get knocked on the head in the first skirmish."

"Thou shalt not," cried Annette, giving her brown head a defiant toss, and stamping her foot with something like wrath. "Thou shalt not be killed. How canst thou talk of it with the sun shining and the linnet singing?"

"Is he singing?" asked Jean, picking up a pebble, and looking up angrily at the tree in which the bird sang on, unconscious of its danger.

But Annette snatched the stone from her lover's hand, and throwing

it away, asked reproachfully : "What has the bird done to thee that thou shouldst wish to hurt it?"

"Why is he singing up there?" asked Jean, sullenly; "why is he happy whilst I must either work here like a slave, or go and be shot like a dog?"

"But thou shalt not be shot," cried Annette, fondly throwing her arms around his neck; "thou shalt come back and marry Annette, and die when thou art ninety!" she added, with a joyous laugh at her own prophecy, for Jean was young and handsome too, so Annette could laugh at the prospect of his wrinkles and white hair.

"Ay, come back and marry," he said bitterly; "come back, and toil, and rear children on bread and water, and die a pair of beggars like Mathurin and his wife."

Annette drew back from him with offended love and wounded pride.

"Is there no God?" she asked. "Wilt thou not work for me, and shall I not work for thee? Is there no God, I say?"

Jean did not answer this. He only said, with a deep, sad sigh: "It is time—I must be going now—good-bye."

All Annette's displeasure, and all her fortitude too, fell as he uttered the words. Again she threw her arms around his neck, but this time it was to weep and sob on his breast. And now came the parting, the caresses, the vows, the tears, the fond promises, all that from time immemorial has marked the sundering of two young hearts. Then Jean said again that he must go, and he did not merely say it—he went.

Annette sat as he had left her at the root of the tree, and at first she was mute; but when she saw that Jean did not look round, that he walked away steadily, and that every step took him more surely from her, she stretched out her arms and she raised her voice, fond and imploring: "Jean, come back—come back to me," she cried.

But Jean had not heard her, or if he did hear her, he heeded her not. A winding of the lane soon hid him from her view, and all was over—Jean was gone. Annette longed to rise and follow him, but she did not. All was over, and it was best for him that it should be over.

So she stayed where he had left her, and flinging herself on the earth she gave way to her grief. It was violent, but brief. In the first place because it was not Annette's temper to grieve long, in the second because it was near noonday, and Annette had her cows to milk. "And the poor brutes will be lowing and lowing," thought Annette, with remorseful fondness, as she sat up and roused herself. The glimpse of sunshine was all gone from the *cavée*, it looked once more very green and lonely; but the little linnet, after being silent awhile, began its song anew, and Annette almost smiled as she heard it. Surely there could be no enduring pain or sorrow in a world in which linnets sang so joyously! Such were not indeed Annette's thoughts, but thus she felt, and a girl goes more by her feelings than by her thoughts all the world

over. So she rose, if not gaily, at least cheerfully, and answering a faint lowing which she heard from afar, she said, in a clear high voice, "I am coming, La Brune ! I am coming, Blanchette ! I am coming."

La Brune and Blanchette were two stately Norman cows, and they stood next to Jean in Annette's heart. She had a foible for Blanchette, who was white, and spotless, and young, but she would not acknowledge it, and always made most of La Brune. She now found the pair grazing on a slope of the hill, near the entrance of the *cavée*. When they saw their faithful handmaiden coming towards them, they raised their voices again and lowed a reproachful welcome.

"Yes, I am late, La Brune, I know I am," confessed Annette ; "but thou seest, my daughter, I should part with poor Jean, and just tell me, if thou canst, how much water will flow down the river before my Jean comes back?"

To this question La Brune gave no sort of reply, but she looked meekly with her large brown eye at Annette, who somehow or other felt both understood and comforted. What the convenient friend, nurse, or slave was to the heroine of the ancient drama, La Brune and Blanchette were to Annette. When she came to them in the lonely pasture she told them her troubles ; and once, when she had had a little quarrel with Jean, she had, after leaving him in great anger in the *cavée*, come to La Brune, and leaning against her glossy shoulder, cried both her grief and her anger away, and walked ten miles the next morning to make it up again with her lover.

"The patient dumb beast seemed to think I had been too hasty," she confessed to Jean ; "and she looked at me with such eyes, such eyes that I felt I must come back to thee." Do not laugh at Annette, reader, as did Jean, for her simplicity. Gentle, patient La Brune might be as good a confidant and as safe an adviser as any, and as Annette now sat down and milked her and again told her and Blanchette how she and Jean had parted, do not wonder if the poor girl's heart felt less heavy.

"Thou art in a great hurry, Blanchette," she said, nodding towards her favourite, who lowed rather impatiently ; "but never mind, my girl, I shall be with thee soon, and this is the last time for long that I shall leave either of you to go and meet Jean in the *cavée* ! And who makes thee fat and fair as thou art, Blanchette ? I know—I know ! *Maitre Blondel* wonders why you both thrive so since I am with him, but I know who gets up with dawn and who steals *Maitre Blondel's* bran and hay to give to *Maitre Blondel's* two cows. He is none the poorer, since you are his, and your milk is all the better, and your coat is all the more glossy for it ; and if he were to find it out to-morrow I should not care," thought Annette, tossing her brown head defiantly at her absent master. And so she went on talking to the two cows till she suddenly remembered that Jean was marching farther and farther away from her,

and, overpowered with sorrow, she cried as if her heart would break, before poor Blanchette was half milked.

When Annette reached her master's farm, on her return from the pasture, she met in the courtyard, which she crossed on her way to the kitchen, that Job's comforter who from time immemorial has been found at the elbow of lovers in distress. Alexandrine, called Andrine for short, was, like Annette, Maître Blondel's servant, but she was also his cousin fourth removed, and though this did not lighten her share of the work, it gave her tongue considerable privileges. To the rights of cousinship, her forty odd years she considered added those of experience; and as this seemed to have been of the dark kind, her greeting to Annette was not exactly cheerful.

"So poor Jean is gone," she said, plaintively; "poor fellows, they go, but they do not come back. My sister's Alexis went last year, and he never came back."

"Alexis sent word that he was alive and well last Easter Sunday," replied Annette.

"So he did, but he may have been killed on the Monday," retorted Andrine, gloomily.

Annette coloured angrily, but did not reply.

"And poor Denise, Jean's old aunt, may starve now," continued Andrine.

"She shall not starve," said Annette, and swinging her milk-pail, to the imminent peril of its contents, she walked into the great farm kitchen.

Maître Blondel, a shrewd, keen old Norman, shook his head dolefully as he saw his handsome servant girl.

"Never mind, Annette," he said, "never mind, thou'lt get another." And having thus implied that Jean was defunct so far as his lover-like usefulness went, he walked away, leaving Annette to her indignation.

"Does he, too, think poor old Denise will starve?" wrathfully thought Annette. "Well, they shall see, all of them, whether she shall want or not, and they shall see, too, whether I shall not have my Jean back again!"

Denise lived at the top of the hill up which climbed the one street of Manneville, and up that street Annette walked alone that same evening. The red sunlight crept up the hill, turning the old gray houses into golden palaces, whilst a rosy flush passed across the blue sky, and the little church above sent forth a merry peal of bells for a christening. Children played noisily; women in white caps listened, with their pitchers, on their way from the river; old men stood at their doors; everything looked fair and every one looked happy. "And everything shall look ten times prettier, and every one shall look ten times happier, when my Jean comes back," thought Annette, with a swelling heart. In that mood, sad though hopeful, she reached the house of Denise. It was



one of the oldest in all Manneville. It stood on the top of the hill, close to the church, and its back windows overlooked the churchyard. It had been strong and sturdy once, but now it looked crumbling and loose. The broad, low arch above which it was built showed many a perilous gap in its stone ribs, and had neither gate nor barrier. Beyond that arch there was a glimpse of a green, weedy garden, of desolate aspect; and beneath it, on the right-hand side, two insecure stone steps and a wooden door gave admittance to the rooms which Denise had kept for her own use. The upper portion of the house was too unsafe to be tenanted, and Denise was too poor to keep it in repair. "The place will last my time," she used to say, but though she was old and infirm there were people who thought that Denise would outlive her dwelling.

Annette's foot was light, yet as she went up the steps a loose stone rolled away. Her hand was already on the latch, and she had half opened the door, when a shrill voice within cried out:

"Ah! you know I cannot go to you. You know I cannot, you little vagabonds. But I shall tell your father when he comes home. I will, I tell you that I will."

Annette pushed the door open, and stepped into the dark and dingy room where Denise sat, day after day, moaning and lamenting. The old woman bent forward and shaded her eyes with her palsied hand to look at the intruder. Annette had left the door open, and a stream of rich red sunshine came in with her and lit her stately young figure and bright handsome face till Denise was dazzled.

"Who is it?" she asked feebly. "Who is it?"

"I am Annette," answered the young girl. "I come to see you, Denise, and to tell you that since Jean is gone I will be to you as he was. He was as a son, and I shall be as a daughter."

Denise knew her now. She did not answer. She turned her head away in remorse and grief, in joy and shame; for poor old Denise had been selfish, and fearing lest her share of Jean's love and, alas! of Jean's money, should be less because of Annette, she had done all she could to part the lovers. And now it was Annette who knew all this, Annette who came to her in her loneliness and desolation. It was the story of Ruth and Naomi over again—that story eternally young in its beautiful truth: and Denise, like a Scripture woman of old, raised her voice and wept.

"You must not cry, you shall not cry," said Annette, flinging her arms round the neck of Denise; and laying her young warm head on the old woman's heart, she said cheerfully, almost gaily, "Ah! how happy we both shall be when Jean comes back!"

And Annette was faithful to her promise. She did not wrong her master, but she was far more to old Denise than Jean had ever been. She rose before dawn to go and wash her linen and prepare her food for

the day. She mended her clothes, she kept her poor house clean, and better than all, she filled that house with bright glimpses of youth. Only one part of her pledge Annette could not redeem: Denise died two years after Jean had gone away, and never saw him again.

This one hope then had dropped out of her life, but Annette would not read its meaning. Denise was old, and would have died if Jean had been at home. She mourned for her because she loved her, but Jean was well; he had not been wounded once, though he had already been in two pitched battles, and he must return when all these weary wars were over. In the meanwhile, and because she thought he would like it, Annette bought his aunt's old tumble-down house. Money was scarce, and everything else was cheap, so she got it for a song, and the money was sent to Jean, who, poor fellow, must need it, leading the hard life he led.

Jean had been gone four years, and it was the harvest time. A band of reapers wound through the plains of Manneville on their way back to the village. They were chiefly women: the men had been called year after year to another harvest—sown in tears and reaped in blood; the last had been gathered on the field of Waterloo, and many a son, many a brother, was never to see Manneville again. Yet, though she had not heard of Jean for some weeks, Annette walked at the head of the reapers, bearing lightly a heavy sheaf of corn upon her brown head, and looking free from thought or care. She could feel sorrow, but not its apprehensions, and what she felt she always showed with the daring frankness of her nature.

"Some people can be merry when they should be crying," bitterly said one of the women behind her. "Why, Jean may be dead, Annette."

Annette turned round and faced her with flashing eyes.

"Jean is not dead," she answered angrily, and she stamped her foot and shook her brown head so that it was as if a strong breeze had passed through the sheaf of corn.

"And how canst thou tell?" moaned the woman behind her; "how canst thou tell, Annette?"

Before Annette could answer, Andrine came down the hill to meet them, waving her arms, and exclaiming, in broken words: "News—Alexis!—my sister's Alexis! He is here! Oh, there has been such terrible fighting!"

Annette stepped up to her, and seized her arm with a strong, hard grasp:

"Jean!" she said, gasping.

"He has been badly wounded," answered Andrine; "but——"

"Will he live?"

"Yes; but——"

Annette did not stay to hear the rest. Her keen eyes had seen the

group of which Alexis was the centre, and with the swift, straight flight of a bird she sped towards it up the hill. He would live—a cripple, maybe, a poor, mutilated creature—she did not care. He would live, and she would toil from morning till night, and from night till morning again, if need be, for her husband. She did not hear Andrine's voice calling her back. She only saw the church looking so red in the sunlight, the low, broken churchyard wall, on which Alexis sat, with his arm in a sling, and the eager men and women, who listened breathless to his woful tale. Alas! Annette did not think of that tale then. Lost battles, invading armies, and the humiliation of her country were forgotten. She only remembered her own love-story and its young hero.

"Tell him to come back," she cried, all breathless; "tell him that I will nurse him, work for him; that I do not care for poverty or toil; tell him to come back."

She had not taken time to throw down her burden; and as she stood in the centre of the group, with the sheaf of yellow corn, full of red poppies and blue corn-flowers, resting on her brown head, Annette looked wonderfully handsome, for her cheeks were flushed, and her dark eyes shone like fire. But there are days and hours when even beauty loses her boasted empire over the heart of man. Alexis frowned, and looked askance at the ardent girl who so readily forgot her country and its woes.

"Do hearken to her!" he grumbled indignantly. "It is all her Jean, is it? Why, Jean is married," he added, turning full upon her.

The cruel words were repented as soon as they had been uttered; but nothing could recall them.

"I was not to tell thee so bluntly," resumed Alexis, looking rather remorseful. "Jean is sorry, and as fond of thee as ever; but he was left for dead, and a farmer in those parts picked him up, and the farmer's daughter must needs fall in love with him. Jean was sick of fighting, and he told me to tell thee this also, that, being both so poor, it was no use for you to marry and be wretched in your old age; and thou must bear him no ill-will, Annette, for he could not help himself; and she is not at all handsome," added Alexis, consolatorily.

But Annette did not speak. She stood, with her upraised hands still supporting her sheaf of corn, in the attitude of the captive Carian women, whose bearing of burdens for their masters gave a name, it is said, to the *Cariatidæ*. But if she had been one of those sad women in very truth, Annette could not have looked more full of grief than she looked; and their stone effigy was surely never colder and more rigid than this girl as she listened to the soldier's tidings. She saw him sitting on the broken churchyard wall; she saw the red light passing away from the faces around her, from the gravestones sunken low in the grass; she saw it stealing up to the church belfry and melting into the pale upper air, and as that light left everything cold, wan, and chill when it had

vanished, so from that hour forth became the outer world to this stricken girl. The sunlight had departed from her life, and upon it there had fallen the grayness of evening. That grayness was on the fair face of nature no less than on every countenance she saw ; and as all things were to her, so did she become in the eyes of others. From that hour forth the joyous beauty died out of her young face ; the light passed from her eyes, even as love and faith went out of her full, warm heart. When she now spoke—and her pause of silence was no longer than strange tidings warrant—every one who saw and heard Annette felt that she was a changed woman.

"Tell him," she said, in a cold, hard voice, "that the man who grudged his blood to his country is a coward ; tell him that the man who broke his faith to his promised wife is a traitor ; and tell him," she added, as if this were the culminating point of her revengeful denunciation, "that he will die on the straw like a beggar, and that Annette, poor though he thought her, will die on a good warm bed, and leave something wherewith to bury her."

She said it ; and neither putting down her burden, nor faltering in step or look, she went her way.

"Is she mad?" said Alexis, staring. "How am I to tell Jean all that?"

## CHAPTER II.

Forty odd years had gone by, and Manneville was much the same as ever. It was rather less agricultural than it had been under the First Napoleon's reign, but then it had a good deal less of fighting than in those days of epic victories. It had also taken to weaving, and become a cotton district. From five in the morning till ten of the night, you could hear the click of the loom in its long, lonely street ; and in the summer time the old women who sat by their open doors crooning endless songs were unwinding cotton for the labour of the young. Strength was spent and gone, but patience and useless time were theirs still.

On a calm summer evening an aged woman sat thus at the door of a little low house in the street of Manneville ; with a feeble and palsied hand she unwound a skein of blue cotton, but no song passed her faded lips. She was too old and wearied for the effort.

"Is it ready, Aunt Andrine?" asked a man's voice within.

"Not yet, Alexis," feebly answered Andrine, who, since Maitre Blondel's death, had been living with her late nephew's son.

The loom in the room within ceased its labour, and Alexis came forth and stood looking at his great-aunt from the threshold. This was not the Alexis who had come back from the wars with his arm in a sling—he had been dead some years, but his second son, a handsome, bright-haired young Norman, who worked hard and supported his mother, his

great-aunt, and two little twin sisters, who had most inopportunately made their appearance six months before his father's death, by his labour. He was a gay, frank-looking young fellow, with a little touch of red in his hair, and a spark ever ready to kindle in his blue eye. He looked tenderly at his great-aunt, and taking the cotton from her hand, he said :

"Go in and rest, Aunt ; Annette shall do that."

"But Annette must be paid," said Andrine, looking frightened.

"Of course she must," replied Alexis.

"And she will not give credit."

"Do I ask it, Aunt?"

"But Alexis, my boy, think of the money ; and we are so many, and it all falls on thee, and I am useless and a burden——"

"And I am the best weaver in Manneville," interrupted Alexis, whose fault was not excess of modesty ; "so I say you shall unwind no more cotton from this day forth, and that old miser Annette shall work for us."

Andrine was going to utter another feeble remonstrance, but Alexis, who had no time to spare, walked away briskly up the hill, and soon reached the house that had of yore belonged to Denise.

Manneville is one of those places over which years pass and leave no trace, unless when they reckon up into centuries. The houses around this dwelling were all unaltered ; and the more striking therefore seemed the change which Time had wrought in this one. It had been firmly repaired to begin with ; then the room below, in which old Denise had lived her sad life, had been turned into a shop, and now opened in the street. It was invitingly full of the most varied goods. Sugar, tape, baskets, wooden shoes, brooms, coffee, and list slippers, appeared there in seductive profusion ; for this was the shop of Manneville, its only one, and almost everything that Manneville needed that shop could supply. And here, for forty odd years, Annette had been making money ; and the more she made the more she craved, said the little censorious world around her. This shop Alexis now entered. It was vacant. He walked on to a cold and bare-looking kitchen behind ; that, too, was empty ; then looking through a dull window into a little courtyard, beyond which stood an outhouse whence came the click of a loom, he said aloud, "Here is work for you, Annette."

"Who is there?" asked a voice, which came not from the outhouse at which Alexis was staring, but from a room upstairs.

"Leave off counting your gold and come down," said Alexis, a little brusquely ; "I bring you money under the shape of work."

"Leave it on the counter, then, for I am not going down just yet," answered Annette's voice ; "as for my gold, I do not keep it here, but in the drawer of the dresser, and if thou chooseth to count it for me, thou mayest do so."



"Mind, I shall come for this cotton in an hour," replied Alexis, with out deigning to notice Annette's taunting remark ; and he walked away slamming the shop-door after him with some temper. If there was a woman in all Manneville whom he hated that woman was Annette.

She soon came down, took the cotton from the counter, and began unwinding it by the kitchen window, and so she sat in the deepening twilight, till the sound of the loom in the outhouse ceased, and a young girl crossed the yard and entered the kitchen.

"Here, finish this, Rose," said Annette, rising ; "I will kindle the fire ; its light will do for thee." She threw a few splinters of wood on the hearth, and set fire to them. Presently the bright flame shot up, and in its glow appeared Rose, a blooming girl, with a demure, dimpled face, who sat unwinding assiduously and said not a word. The flickering firelight also lit up Annette's pale and withered features, and spite that vivid glow, very aged and wan did Annette look, as, after setting a large saucepan full of water on the trivet, she crouched on a low stool, with her hands clasped around her knees.

"Rose," she said, "who took thee when thou wert a poor forlorn orphan ?"

"You did," briskly replied Rose.

"Who taught thee weaving ?"

"You did," again promptly answered Rose, who seemed to be going through a sort of catechism.

"Who put the bread into thy mouth ?"

"You did, Annette."

"Rose, men are bad."

"All," suggested Rose.

"All," answered Annette, "so bad."

"So bad !" repeated Rose with perfect docility.

"Ha ! ha !" laughed Annette, triumphantly ; "I taught thee that too. Thou wilt remember it. Rose, work hard, save money, and live alone—live alone."

There was a pause, then Annette resumed :

"When I found that money was so good a thing I gave up being a farm servant and took to weaving. When I had earned and saved money by that, I opened a shop. They laughed at me—they said I was crazy ; but they found out that my sugar, and coffee, and brandy, were good ; so, instead of walking two leagues to get the like, they bought from me. And Jean—where is Jean now, Rose ? On the straw somewhere, as I foretold. I wish him no evil—there is no need ; but his cattle died, his wife died, his children died, and he went away in the night, and they found his house empty the next morning. Some say he went and drowned himself. But Jean loved life too well to do that. He is living still, Rose ; only on what road is he wandering, at whose door is he knocking with a beggar's stick in his hand and a beggar's

wallet on his back? And Annette, whom he cast away for her poverty—Annette has a shop, a roof, and a home,—and Annette has two thousand francs saved up for her old age. Thou hast seen them, Rose—all Manneville has seen my two thousand francs. It is no lie, no invention. I have them there in gold; let Jean come and see them when he pleases. I have got them, one hundred Napoleons.” And she rocked herself to and fro in the triumph of a resentment which years had not abated or worn out.

“Is that cotton ready?” asked Alexis, coming in.

“It will soon be,” answered Rose.

“So thou wert listening outside?” said Annette, rising and confronting the young man. “Well, the money is there, and thou shalt see it.” She went to the dresser, pulled a drawer open, and took it out, so that he should see the gold pieces scattered within.

“There they are,” she said triumphantly; “all Manneville knows it, and who dare touch them? This is bread, this is house, this is clothes for Annette when she can work no more.”

“What do I care for your money?” curtly replied Alexis. “I am young and strong, and I can work and earn plenty for myself and mine!”

“Canst thou? And suppose thou hast to go away and be a soldier like Jean, what money wilt thou earn then?”

“Is that cotton ready?” asked Alexis.

“Almost ready,” replied Rose.

“I know what thou wilt do,” continued Annette. “Thou wilt do as Jean did. Have as little fighting as thou canst, and marry the farmer’s daughter.”

“And what is it to you whom I marry?” asked the young man angrily. “Do I not pay you for whatsoever work you do for me?” he added, throwing a copper coin on the table.

“Do I ever give credit?” retorted Annette.

“Of one thing be sure,” he added, taking the cotton from the hand of Rose, “that none belonging to me shall ever come for help to you.”

“I should think not,” laughed Annette, in great scorn, as he walked away. “Come to me, indeed!”

She stood with the drawer in her hand, looking at the gold within with greedy, loving eyes. She loved it, and it was the only thing she loved now; but that love had bred no miser’s dread or mistrust in her heart. A defiant sense of her own power to guard and protect it, was what still remained to Annette of the original nobleness of her nature.

Annette was a sound sleeper, spite her years, but on this night her slumbers were light and broken. She felt restless too, and got up and walked about her room. The night was bright and clear, a night of white summer moonlight. Annette opened her window, and looked out on the little churchyard that lay below. It had black crosses, a

few sunken graves, and at its further end the ruins of an old abbey church. Annette had looked at this narrow spot so often, that she knew its aspect as well by night as by day. In a moment, therefore, she saw that there was a change in the shadow of the ruin on the grass. That shadow was deeper and darker than on other nights, and once it moved. Annette left her window, and entered the room of little Rose; it was vacant, and the bed had not been slept in. Annette walked downstairs, left the house by a back door, and entered the churchyard through a gap in the wall that was ever open. Very softly Annette stole round the ruins, and presently she saw little Rose sitting alone on the pedestal of a broken pillar. What was she doing there? Was this young girl thinking of her quiet neighbours the dead? Did she in whose veins the tide of life was so fresh and quick, wonder at their long calm sleep, and, maybe, pity them for the cold passionless trance in which they lay, with the dull earth above their mouldering coffins, deadening all the pleasant sounds of life! Alas, little Rose would have stared and opened her round black eyes indeed at the good sentimental soul that had propounded such strange questions. Why should she wonder that the dead were dead? Or, why should she think of them save in her prayers for their poor souls? Above all, why should she fear them? As a child, Rose had played amongst the graves with the sexton's children, gathering the wild flowers which grew profusely there; day after day she had looked at them from her window, and these silent dead, who never railed, who never scolded, could not awe her now. She could have sat and looked at their graves till morning, just as she listened all the day long to Annette's little railings at love and mankind, and hope and faith. And Annette knew well enough what Rose was doing there. Of course the girl was waiting for her lover—only, who was he? Annette was not kept long in suspense. She heard a step, and presently Alexis appeared in the moonlight, stepping quickly amongst the grass-grown graves. So eager was he to meet his pretty Rose, that he brushed by Annette without seeing her. His father had been the sexton many years, and no more than Rose did Alexis fear the dead. The young girl rose on seeing him, and the lovers, walking quickly round the ruins, vanished from Annette's view. She stole after them till she saw them again. They were outside the churchyard now, and stood in the deep shadow of the wall, speaking in whispers so low that only now and then could Annette catch a few words of their discourse. What she heard was enough to show her its purport.

"But I do not believe her," little Rose said once, with a soft, low laugh. "I know thou wilt always be true to me. I let her talk on, and I say no or yes; but, of course, I know better than Annette."

Something else said by Alexis drew forth the same protest under another form.

"Poor Annette!" kindly said Rose, "she is very good to me—only,

she is crazy on that score. She cannot forget that Jean ; and then she is old—oh, so old !” she added pityingly.

“Old people should hold their tongues then,” sententially remarked Alexis, “and not talk about love. They know nothing about it.”

Not far from the spot where Annette stood lay the grave of old Denise, a grave forgotten by all save her ; and as she heard the young man’s sentence upon age, she smiled to herself—an odd, bitter smile. Oh, strange folly of the young, who think that love dies with the rosy cheeks and bright eyes that gave it birth ! What did that boy, in the pride of his young manhood, know of love—of such love as had left its burning traces in Annette’s life ? She had heard enough—she cared to hear no more. She passed through the gap in the wall, and walked away, leaving the lovers to their stolen meeting by the graves of the dead.

To have suffered much is, in some sort, not to be able to suffer again. The treachery of the child she had reared did not affect Annette in the least. Her heart was seared ; besides, she remembered her own youth, and knew that neither bars, nor bolts, nor affection, nor duty, nor anything mortal would have kept her from her Jean. Rose was but following the law of her nature, and Annette did not sit up to tax her with her folly. She did not upbraid her the next morning, or scold, or rail in any fashion ; but two months later she quietly said to her one day :

“Rose, thou dost not want me any longer, and I never wanted thee. Thy cousin, the farrier’s widow, has asked thee to go and live with her, I know—wilt thou do so ?”

The bright black eyes of Rose filled with tears, and she looked at Annette in silent dismay.

“Then—then you never cared about me ?” exclaimed the girl, in a broken voice.

“I ? No, indeed. But what matter—thou hast got Alexis !”

Rose turned pale, but she answered not a word, and left the next day. Alexis was very angry at all this, and turned his head aside when he met Annette. Rose, on the other hand, gave many a soft, pleading look to the woman who had reared her ; but all she ever got in return was a careless nod when they crossed each other in the street of Manneville.

Time, which brought no changes to the solitary woman, told heavily upon some in the little world around her. Amongst the most afflicted was Andrine, who became bed-ridden that winter ; and, as the mother of Alexis had been weak and ailing since her husband’s death, the burden upon the young man grew very heavy. To crown all, and verify the sad *dictum* that misfortunes never come singly, he got a bad number at the yearly conscription in spring. Had Alexis been a widow’s eldest son, he would have been perforce exempted from a soldier’s fate ; but

his elder brother had already availed himself of the privilege, and Alexis must leave his home, his aunt, his little sisters, and his mother to the care of that elder brother, who had managed to provide himself with a wife and half a dozen children of his own. It was a hard case, and all Manneville was full of pity for it; but when Annette heard of it she only smiled, and said grimly, "Oh, bah! he will marry the farmer's daughter."

She stopped little Rose to tell her so the next time they met, but the girl only looked at her with sad eyes and a very white face, and, shaking her head, walked on and answered not one word. A faint gleam of pity shot across Annette's heart, but no wintry sun was ever colder. Had she not suffered, and did she not know how grief had to be borne and conquered?

Early in the summer, Annette found it needful to go to Fontaine on matters connected with her trade. She was thinking of extending her business by adding cotton and woollen cloths to her stock; and as she never took anything upon trust, Annette shut up her shop one morning, and went off to Fontaine, which is two leagues distant, in order to see about this matter herself. The walk was a long one, for Annette was not so strong as she once had been, and the heat soon overpowered her. She left the high road for a bye-path, in the hope of getting some shade, but there was none. Field after field of yellow corn spread before her. She looked far and wide, and wondered if she must cross that burning plain. Had she not mistaken the way? She had kept a shop so long that she had surely forgotten the paths with which she had once been so familiar? So thinking, Annette turned to the right, where she saw a low ridge of green rising above a yellow corn-field, and after walking a few minutes, suddenly found herself at the entrance of a cool and shady path, that very Lady's Cavée that had been a spot so memorable in Annette's life. It went down between its steep green banks, with its thick, dark trees, taller than of yore, meeting high above and shutting out the sky: a fresh, verdant, and lovely avenue still. For forty odd years and more Annette's feet had not trod that path—for forty odd years she had shunned it like a pestilence, and shut it out from her memory as a spot accursed; yet now she stood gazing at it like one entranced; and when a sunbeam suddenly peeped through a gap of the foliage, and threw itself like a bar of pure red gold across the brown earth; when a little linnet, perched on a bough, grew blithe to see that glimpse of bright sun, and, raising its voice, piped forth his pleasant lay, Annette sat down upon the earth, and, turning pale as death, let her head sink upon her lap.

The sunbeam, the linnet, the green old path, had brought it all back. The treachery, the abandonment after long waiting, the intolerable grief of Alexis' tidings, had vanished. The forty odd years of lonely bitterness had fled. It was as if some kind fairy's wand had touched Annette,



had sent the bloom back to her faded cheeks and the fond warmth to her withered heart. In that lane she and Jean had met forty odd years before. In that lane she and Jean had parted. Vows, caresses, hopes, and fervent desires had haunted that green path, which had kept no more token of those bygone things than of the footsteps that trod it daily. More than a generation had passed away since those lost days of Annette's youth. Other happy or sorrowful lovers had met here and heard the linnet's song. Other fond hearts had outlived their woes like Annette, and sadder fate than hers buried their dead love and thought no more about it. But, warm and living, hers now rose from its cold grave. "I cannot bear it," sobbed and moaned Annette. "Jean, Jean, come back to me—come back." Poor, white-haired, wrinkled Annette calling on her lost or dead lover! But the tide of life so unnaturally checked within her had returned with a force equally unnatural. For that moment she forgot years and their changes; for that moment she was a girl again; and sitting thus on the earth, with outstretched arms, she unconsciously took the very attitude, and uttered the very words, of the forty odd years old parting. But then Jean had walked away with downcast eyes, and never looked round; and now, as she stared wildly before her, Annette saw but the *cavée*—very green and lovely. The streak of sunshine was gone, the little linnet was mute, and the sweet light and pleasant song of love had again died away out of her heart. With a dreary sigh she rose, and not entering the *cavée*—she felt she could not—walked along its green row of trees in the field above it. But it was as if this revulsion of feeling had taken away from Annette not merely the bitterness but also such strength as had survived her youth and its grief. She had not walked long when she felt so wearied that she was fain to rest once more; so she sat down on an old gray stone, the landmark between broad fields of corn and wide plains of pasture.

"It was harvest time, and I had my sheaf of corn on my head when Alexis told me," thought Annette. But something—some cloud had passed away from the old woman's heart, for the remembrance of that dark hour brought back no bitterness with it. "Poor fellow," she thought in her reverie, "he meant to fly from Poverty, and he was only rushing into her very arms. Poor fellow, I wonder where he is now?"

Her eye wandered over the wide lonely field, then came back to the tall nodding trees of the *cavée*. She sat near that gap through which the sunbeam had stolen in, and she could not resist the temptation of looking down and seeing the very spot where she and Jean had parted. She rose, she made a wide break in the tangled hedge of sweet honey-suckle and marjoram, whence bees came out much disturbed and rather angry, and bending forward Annette looked wistfully below. Yes, they had walked along that path many a time, her hand locked in his, his arm around her, their eyes fastened on each other in fond adoration; and once, oh! in such yearning sorrow. And one last time they had

sat at the root of that gnarled oak, and whilst Annette was weeping on Jean's shoulder, the careless linnet above them had broken forth into song, and, listening to that false little prophet, Annette had thought "Thus our grief will end in gladness." But she forgot that now, she only thought "Yes, it was here; and here too, other girls will come and bid him good-bye, and go through it all—the love, the parting, the bitterness, and the forgetting."

And even as Annette thought thus, a young man and a young girl came stepping out of the green gloom arm-in-arm, and Rose and Alexis suddenly stood still in the path below her. She looked at them in silent amazement. It was all like a dream; and like a sleeper in a dream she felt, as she gazed and listened to these two. What had brought them here? she vaguely wondered. Alas! she soon knew. Alexis was going to join his regiment in a few days, and being slack of work this morning, he and Rose had come here to pour out the fulness of their hearts in peace before the hour for the final parting came.

"Oh! what shall I do?" said Rose, in a broken voice. "What shall I do when thou art gone?"

"Wait for me, Rose," he replied stoutly. "Wait, and as true as I am a living man I will come back."

"I know it, and I will wait. But, oh! the seven years—the seven weary years of waiting!"

She had raised her face to his—her pretty, dimpled, childish face, that was now pale and wan with sorrow. She looked at him with those merry brown eyes that were now full of tears, and Annette felt sorry for her—only sorry, for though she had reared that child, she had given her no share of her heart's love.

"Oh! my darling, my darling," said Alexis, with a groan. "It is hard to leave thee. I do not grudge the fighting and the danger; but I grudge the parting. Yet I could bear it; for we are young and true, and can wait. But the two old ones and the little ones—what is to become of them? My poor brother will do his best; but he has a wife and six children, and, I do not say it to boast, he is not what I am: the best workman in Manneville. Where I can earn two francs, he gets little more than one. Poor fellow, it is not in him. And what can he do for the two poor old ones, who eat little enough, but who want dainty bits of things to tempt them now and then? And then, my little sisters, how are they to go to school when I am away? They will have to work, to go weeding, or to keep the birds from the corn, or to do anything for a bit or a sup; and when I come back at the end of seven years, I shall see two rough, untaught, slatternly girls,—provided they are no worse," added Alexis, with a groan. "As to the old ones, they will be dead, of course; and when the seven years are out, I shall find two graves in the churchyard, where you and I, Rose, have been so happy together, talking at night, whilst Annette slept."

"But it shall not be so bad as all that," cried poor Rose, sobbing, though she tried to speak of comfort. "I have got a hundred francs in the savings-bank at Fontaine. Only think—one hundred francs, Alexis! And I will get Andrine and your mother things which will tempt them to eat. A fresh egg, a little coffee, and meat to make broth now and then. And thy little sisters shall come to me of an evening, and I will teach them how to read and write; and they shall not be good-for-nothing slatterns when thou comest back; and, please God, there shall not be two graves more in the churchyard when thy seven years are out."

"Thou art a good girl; the best girl alive," said Alexis, looking down at her with fond eyes. "And thou wilt not believe that old witch, Annette?"

"Do not call her so. Annette has been very good to me."

"I know she has; but it maddens me that she should be ever dining in thy ears that I too shall marry the farmer's daughter."

"What matter since I do not believe her?"

"And thou wilt never believe her?"

"Never, living or dead. I know thou wilt be true to me."

She had laid her two little hands on his shoulders, and was looking up at him with the perfect faith which had once burned in Annette's heart for Jean. Trees give out their green leaves year after year, year after year birds sing the same songs, year after year, too, lovers go through the same blissful story. As Annette had felt, as Annette had loved, as Annette had trusted, so did Rose, with less of passion but not with less of sincerity. And would her fate be as that of Annette had been? The pale old woman who sat listening above did not know. She could not have vowed now that Alexis would marry the farmer's daughter. She might be mistaken in her prophecy after all. Jean had deceived her; but this young man, who now slowly walked down the green *cavée*, with his arm around Rose, might be true. She could not know, she could not tell. For a long time after the lovers had vanished, Annette sat still, speculating vaguely, as if her dream were not yet out. Rose and Alexis had sat down again a little lower in the *cavée*, for she heard their voices near her; but she made no attempt to follow them, or to listen to their discourse. A torpor, which she could not shake off, was upon her; and when she at length aroused herself from that long reverie, Annette felt that she was not able to go to Fontaine. "I must go home," she said; and home she went forthwith.

"What ails Annette?" said several people who entered her shop during the day.

They all wondered to find her so dull, so apathetic, so careless. One woman had to speak twice before Annette answered her. Another, after fumbling in her pocket, stammered something about having forgotten her money, and Annette, to her great amazement, said, in a low, wearied voice: "Never mind; it will do another time."

Annette herself felt that she was strangely altered. When the brightness of love had left her life, the burning fire of hate had come in its stead ; and now that love was gone, and that hate seemed dead, her life felt as a cold white blank. She tried to rouse herself, and went to look at her money. The shining Napoleons rolled one over another as she drew the drawer out ; they made a pleasant jingle, and glittered in Annette's dark kitchen ; and for a moment her eye lit, but she soon fell back into her apathy, and shut the drawer with a sigh. Even that was gone. The gold was not so bright as it had been, and it no longer made sweet music in Annette's ear. She sat down in a chair, and, clasping her hands around her knees, stared around her lonely home. She was still too brave to care for her solitude ; and she had left off loving too long to grieve because she had nothing to cherish in her old age. But those sweet fountains of human kindness which had once welled so freely from her generous heart, had been unsealed since the morning, and now poured forth an abundant flow. She thought of Alexis—not of the Alexis who hated her, but of the brave young fellow who was leaving his mother, his aunt, his little sisters, his young mistress—and her heart ached for him. Jean, too, had loved a poor forlorn creature. To her he had been false ; but to old Denise, at least, he had been true. And she knew Rose. What she had been to Denise, that girl would be to the forsaken family in will, though assuredly not in deed ; for how far could her poor earnings go towards the lightening of such a burden ? And then the slow misery of those seven years rose before Annette, and sickened her. " If they had only had two thousand francs, my two thousand francs," she thought, " they would buy off Alexis, and then how they would all laugh and be glad ! " Then Annette shook her head and sighed. Two thousand francs ! They might as well hope to get the emperor's crown as so huge a sum. No one would even lend it to them, for as they were far too poor to pay it back this must be a gift, not a loan. And who gives two thousand francs away ? Annette laughed aloud at the thought, and steeled her heart against the stricken family. Were they not one and all her enemies ? Andrine had never had a good word for her ; Alexis' mother had boasted of her husband's constancy again and again ; Alexis himself had reviled her ; and Rose, whom she had reared, had deceived her and laughed at her counsel. " I will not think about them," said Annette to her own thoughts ; but she thought about them through the whole of that day, and through the whole of the following night. " I wish, since he must go, that he were gone," she said wearily to her own heart.

The eve of that day for which Annette longed came at length, and it saw a sad gathering in the home of Alexis. The young man was out on some needful business ; but Rose and a neighbour sat with the two sorrowful old women. Andrine was moaning feebly from her bed, Alexis' mother sat weeping silently in her chair, and the two twins crouched

together on a low seat in a dark corner, looking scared. Rose was getting the supper ready; and the neighbour, a stout florid woman, was holding forth.

"I say it is no good fretting," she said, in her long, drawling Norman voice, "no good at all. There may be no war to begin with, and even if there should be a war, there is no more than forty or fifty thousand killed in a battle, and out of all the hundred thousand men that are soldiers——"

Here the latch of the door was raised, and Annette entered the room and stood amongst them. Never before had Annette crossed the threshold of that dwelling, and they all stared at her in silent amazement, and none more so than Rose, who, turning round from the hearth with a saucepan in her hand and the flickering light of the fire on her pale face, seemed speechless, and motionless too, with surprise.

"I can bear it no longer," said Annette, without uttering a word of greeting. "Your trouble is too much for me. I have not slept for five nights; I never can sleep again unless you take this money," she added, laying her two thousand francs, which she had brought tied up in a cloth, upon the table before them.

"What matter about me? I do not want it now, and may never want it. Tell Alexis so, and that he may as well have it as the Emperor, for you all know I have not a soul here to claim it. The Emperor does not want that money, does he? Well, then, have it, and let me not be always hearing your weeping and wailing as I lie awake at night; let me not be ever thinking of what your sorrow and your bitter need would be if he went from you. Let me not think that you two old ones would starve perhaps, and you two little ones do worse, and go wrong without him."

She was turning to the door, and still no one had spoken, not even the neighbour, the width of whose open mouth testified to the extent of her amazement, when Rose stopped her.

"Annette, Annette," she said, "you must not. You want that money; you are old yourself; Alexis will never take it from you; you may want it yet."

"Never mind," replied Annette, gently putting the girl by, "I can work on for a little while yet, and when I cannot, God will provide. God will provide," she repeated in a low voice, as she went forth into the dark night.

Annette had not walked many steps when Rose overtook her. The young girl flung her arms around the old woman's neck, and sobbed passionately upon her breast. "Oh! Annette, Alexis will not take that money. I know he will not," she said, in a low broken voice; "but, oh! we never knew either of us how good you are; never, never."

Annette sighed. "Let me go, child," she said, gently. "You are



not heavy, I dare say, but I feel weak to-night, and cannot bear your weight."

She put her away as she spoke, and walked on, and, though her heart was very full, Rose did not dare to follow her.

When she returned to the house, she found Andrine and the widow hysterical with joy. They seemed unable to conceive that Alexis should reject this Godsend, and were angry with Rose when she said sadly: "Alexis will never take it, never."

The twins, roused from their subdued mood by this strange event, had undone the cloth, and were staring in amazement at its shining contents; and the neighbour, looking over them, said emphatically: "Annette must be mad. She who was so fond of her money! She must be mad! But it is a good thing for Alexis."

"Alexis never will take it," again said Rose, in her sad low voice.

Annette had gone straight home. She closed her shop at once, and put up the shutters herself, as she did every night; but they felt unusually heavy, and Annette was a long time about it. So great was this feeling of weariness, that she did not light the fire for her supper that night, according to her wont. "A little bread and milk will do for me," she thought, sitting down by her black and bare hearth. She felt very weak, but with the weakness there blended a happy softness. Annette knew what she had done, and rejoiced in it. She knew that she was old and friendless, and she felt too that she was very feeble. Her two thousand francs had been as a strong bolt between her and poverty, and with her own hand she had removed it, and poverty might cross her threshold any day, enter her home, and leave it no more. And Alexis, though he should toil from dawn till midnight, could not help her much. Annette knew this too. And she expected nothing from him, but was content that her sacrifice should have been entire and deep. The generous recklessness of her youth had all come back to her, and conquered the coldness of old age. More things came back to Annette then, for as she sat thus musing, and looking at her lonely hearth, she fell asleep, and had a dream in which her young love was with her once more.

Annette dreamed that she was young again, and that, as she walked along a road which she had never seen before, she suddenly met Jean.

"Oh, Jean!" she said, laying her two hands on his shoulders, and looking up in his face, "I have had such a dream! I thought you had gone away and married the farmer's daughter; and only think!" she added, with a gay laugh, of which the young music sounded very sweet even in her dream; "only think! I dreamed I was an old woman, with white hair!"

Jean did not answer, but he gently drew forth a brown curl straying from beneath her white coif, and looked down in her face with a smile.

And they both laughed aloud to think Annette should have dreamed that her dark hair was white.

This was Annette's dream—a dream so happy and so deep that a loud knocking at her door did not break it. In vain Alexis called out, “Annette! do you hear me? Open to me, Annette!”

Annette only said to Jean: “That is Maître Blondel calling me—let him wait a while;” and she dreamed on.

Early the next morning Alexis was at Annette's door again, but it was fast and closed. He knocked, and got no answer. Was she doing it on purpose? Then Alexis remembered that the outhouse in which Rose used to work had a little door which was often on the latch; so he went round to it, and finding it unlocked, as he had half expected, he entered the outhouse, where he had sometimes stolen in to talk to Rose, crossed the yard, and went straight to the kitchen.

“Annette!” he began. “I bring your money.” He paused. The little lamp, of which he had seen the light through the shutters the night before, was burning still on the table, near a cup of milk and a piece of bread, and, sitting by the black, bare hearth was Annette, pale and rigid, with closed eyes, but smiling still.

“Annette! Annette!” he cried; but as he read the meaning of her silent face, he stood awe-struck for a moment; then he bowed his head in his hands, and burst into a loud passion of remorse and grief. Yes, Annette was cold and dead. After Love, had come Hate, the fierce avenger; and when he was conquered, Death, the great peacemaker, closed her wearied eyes, and sent the much-suffering woman to sleep.

The village doctor found a long and learned name for the cause of Annette's death. It mattered little, after all. What good she could do she had done, and she was not called upon to pay the cost of the generous sacrifice which saved a home in Manneville from despair, and filled with joy two true and loving hearts.

And this is the end of Annette's love-story. It began on a lovely May morning, in a green *cavée*, where a happy girl sat waiting for her lover, and it ended forty odd years later with a dream which left its smile on an old woman's lips.

## THOMPSON'S MURDER.

IT occurred in the month of December. Sailor though I am, I have not been always afloat, and have gone in for sojourns, ay, and for occupations, in different countries and places. At this time I held a share in a sheep-run in New Zealand, the manager of which was one David Thompson : a quiet, steady, capable, and well-conducted man. My own head-quarters were mostly at a distant station.

And it was in the latter place that one day towards noon, a Maori, dusty and travel-stained, came up with a letter for me. It proved to be from an acquaintance, whose sheep-walk joined ours. These were the contents :

"DEAR WILSON, — Poor Thompson has been brutally murdered. We cannot tell by whom. I think it must have been done by Manley, who has disappeared. You had better come over at once. Hoping you are well, I remain yours faithfully,  
"SAM BAKER."

At first I scarcely gathered in the true meaning of the words. It seemed to me utterly impossible that a man such as I knew Thompson to be, could have injured or aggravated any one, or made a mortal enemy. I tried to get some information from the messenger ; but I found I might question a bale of goods with as much chance of getting an answer. The Maori could speak but few words of English. Moreover, he had evidently been dispatched immediately upon the first discovery : it was therefore probable that he knew nothing.

There was but one thing to do : I or the other owner must go over at once. He could not ; so it fell to me. Fortunately, we knew of a man capable of replacing Thompson : he was in want of a situation, and we came to terms. By two o'clock in the afternoon, he and I and the Maori were in the saddle.

We halted that night at a station called Sutherland. Six o'clock next morning found us on the road again. We rode all day ; and towards night of the next day, Saturday, got to Baker's house—the man who had written to me. This place was then a new settlement, formed in one of the many small indentations on the east coast of the middle island. Our own farm, through which the high road passed, was near Omaru, about seven miles further on ; but the house David Thompson had lived in was only a mile from Baker's.

We sat up half the night talking over the sad occurrence. Thompson was dead, sure enough. Beyond this bare fact, little or nothing seemed to be known. He was to be buried on the morrow, Sunday. Baker

himself had discovered the body in riding home from Omaru on the previous Monday. He had reached a spot where the road ran through the bush. Hearing a dog bark and whine in an unusual manner, he pulled up to listen. The sounds struck him as most singular. Involuntarily, without knowing why, he seemed to feel a strange sort of interest in them. The noise continuing, Baker whistled on the animal. In a few seconds Thompson's favourite dog "Bob," rushed out of the bush, barking furiously. Baker spoke to it by name, but the dog, seemingly in great excitement, ran back into the bush, his bark changing to a prolonged howl. All this was repeated. Baker then dismounted, tied his horse up, got through the fence, and followed in the dog's track; and there, scarcely fifty yards from the road, he came upon a body, which to his horror he found was Thompson's. It was lying in a sort of natural ditch or hollow. The place around showed no signs of a struggle; the dead leaves and sticks lay smoothly enough on the ground; they scarcely seemed to have been walked on. Baker's first impression was that Thompson had died naturally, from some sudden fit, or heart disease. He lay on his back, one arm doubled under him, the other straight by his side. The face, though pale with the paleness of death, was calm, and not distorted. But this impression was rudely dissipated; for, on lifting the head, Baker saw that the back of the skull was crushed in. The case was a case of murder. Little doubt lay on Baker's mind that the body had been carried to its present spot after death. It was an excellent one for concealment. The bush, which belonged to the only storekeeper then in Omaru, was fenced in on both sides of the road; and, until such time as the clearing began, it could not be used for any purpose. Travellers did not go into the bush: if their road lay through it, there was the convenient highway to take; in short, it was quite impossible to calculate how long the body might have remained undiscovered but for the dog. And how he, poor Bob, found his way there, was, as we thought afterwards, a mystery and a marvel.

The first thing Baker did on the discovery was to ride to David Thompson's house. It struck him that it looked very still. Ere he reached the door, it was opened by a young man named Evans, a labourer on the farm. Baker dismounted, made fast his horse, and inquired for Mrs. Thompson. He told me that this was what occurred:

"She's out," replied Evans.

"Where's she gone to?" asked Baker.

"That's more than I can tell. I've not seen her this good day."

"Not seen her to-day! What on earth do you mean, Evans?"

"Just that," said Evans. "When I got home this morning at eight o'clock I found the house empty."

"Where's Manley?" next demanded Baker.

"It's more than I can tell. I stopped at Omaru all night with my brother; and since I got back this morning I've not seen a living soul—neither Thompson, nor his wife, nor Manley, nor nobody."

This was a most unusual and irregular state of things. The farm was evidently deserted by all belonging to it, except the youngest hand—its work, of course, being left undone. Baker knew but too well where one of the three was; and, instinctively, the absence of the other two seemed to connect itself, in his mind, with what he had discovered. He did not suspect the young man Evans in any way; but he chose to put an abrupt question.

"Where *is* Thompson?"

For all the effect it had on Evans, he might as well have kept it in. Nevertheless, the answer was given in a significant tone.

"I don't *know*"—with a stress on the last word. "But I shouldn't wonder if he's gone after the other two."

The idea conveyed in this had already struck Baker; but, at the same time, it opened up a phase which he had not cast a thought on. Manley had been David Thompson's assistant.

Evans explained. He had noticed sundry things in the behaviour of Mrs. Thompson and Manley towards each other which, if not decidedly wrong, had certainly not been orthodox. What he thought now was, that they had gone off together, and that Thompson was probably on their track. He would, of course, miss them in the early morning. Was sure Thompson had suspected them for some time past. In fact, during the last two or three months, he and Manley had often had a civil growl together.

Baker questioned the young man closely, but could get nothing more out of him. He then communicated the discovery he had made in the bush. There was no mistaking Evans' unfeigned horror and astonishment. In the excitement of the moment he cursed Manley, betraying to which quarter his suspicions pointed. Baker directed him to saddle a horse, and they both returned to the bush, and covered poor Thompson with some blankets they had brought. They then started for Omaru, stopping once only on their way. This was at the "Crown," a small roadside inn, about halfway between the town, as Omaru was beginning to be called, and the farm. Stewart, the landlord, was out, so they rode on to Omaru.

The news spread rapidly. In less than an hour all hands in the place had heard it. Several returned with Baker and Evans to the spot. Lanterns were procured from poor Thompson's house; preparations were made, and the body was brought home. Some of the men attended to it; others lit a fire in the kitchen and put the "billy" on, colonial fashion, for making tea. When all had assembled in the kitchen, a sort of inquest was held, at which the jury were the witnesses. Some little information was gleaned; not much. Who had



done it? That was the chief question, and none could with certainty answer.

While they were discussing, Stewart of the "Crown Inn" arrived; and he gave some important evidence. He said that on the previous night, Sunday, David Thompson was at his house in company with Manley and Nat Brown. They left between five and six in the evening: sober enough, for that matter, but all had had a glass; and they were wrangling together as they rode off in the direction of the farm. That was the last Stewart saw of them.

Nat Brown, who made one of those in the kitchen, having come up with the others, corroborated this: though he had not spoken of it before. Brown said that they had indeed all started together; that he had gone a couple of miles with them on their road, and then turned back. He thought it was about seven when he got home, but his wife could tell. Thompson and Manley rode on in company—as he supposed for the farm. They had been very "nasty" to each other all the way, Brown added, and most likely it had ended in a fight. In fact he had expected it would, and that's why he had parted company and gone back, instead of going on with them to the farm as he had agreed to do. That was Brown's testimony. And it tended more than all that had gone before to implicate Manley. Nothing could be ascertained of the movements of the two horsemen after Brown quitted them. One was dead: the other, there was little doubt, had decamped in company with Mrs. Thompson. One of the men present in the kitchen testified that he had seen Manley and the lady embark at Omaru that very morning in the "Little Wonder," a steamer bound for Wellington.

Many trifling things came out as the men sat together, all tending to the same impression of where the guilt must lie. One fellow spoke of the great intimacy between Manley and Mrs. Thompson; another had heard him speak vindictively of the husband; while several knew that Thompson had a bad feeling towards Manley. After much talking, a sort of open verdict was arrived at. David Thompson had been murdered; there was no *proof* of Manley's guilt, but circumstances pointed strongly to it.

This was the substance of Baker's communication to me as we sat that night by his fire. Ever since Monday the people had talked of nothing else. Everybody had, as it were, made the affair a personal one. However, nothing else had transpired, in spite of research and inquiries.

It was late the next morning when I rose. Breakfast over, I set out for our farm, and questioned Evans myself upon many things. He only repeated what I had already heard. With respect to the murder, he supposed it was the result of Thompson's having followed the runaways.

Divine service was held on Sunday mornings in the principal room of a house in Omaru. The funeral took place directly after it. All the men for miles around attended : no one present could doubt that the poor fellow had been an universal favourite ; and the sorrow and regret at his untimely fate were deep and hearty.

The service had just come to an end when there arose a sudden cry from a sailor-settler : "Sail ho !" It was echoed in many voices. Sure enough, there was a ship of some sort standing in for the usual anchorage. The interest attaching to such an event, in those early days of the settlement, was almost sufficient to make the majority forget, for a time, the sad ceremony just completed. Nearly all who had assisted at it started off for the beach.

The arrival proved to be the "Kenilworth," a fine bark of five hundred tons. She had brought a cargo of sheep from Wellington. The run down had been made in less than three days ; and she was to return thither on Tuesday morning.

The ship had already been several times at Omaru. Captain Murray, her commander, was well known there. He was soon on shore and surrounded by numerous friends. Some eager to hear the latest news from Wellington or England : others anxious to communicate the dire event which, for the moment, was foremost in their thoughts. Steps were directed towards the public-house : in those days that was the chief place of resort in the colonies. Whether bent on pleasure or business, killing time or talking over a bargain, the bar-room was the spot chosen by nearly all men. Women too, for that matter, might often be seen there. There was but one public-house at Omaru, and it was soon pretty full. Baker introduced me to Captain Murray, and we went in together.

Nathaniel Brown kept this tavern : it was called Nat Brown's hotel. It was a large, oblong wooden building, with four or five good-sized rooms, all on the one floor. The door gave entrance to the largest, which, in fact, took up nearly half the house : a bare apartment, with deal tables, benches, and chairs. The bar—a sort of counter running nearly along one end of the room—was a magnificently-decorated affair, with its glass, and gorgeous tables, and coloured liquids. Presiding over its interests was Nat himself ; a perfect Cerberus—for he was about the most villanous-looking man eye ever saw. His great breadth and strength in proportion to his height was remarkable ; the head was large and round, the bull-neck thick, the ears stood forward. His features were repulsive, bad ; his eyes had a squint, his nose, perhaps through some accident, lay nearly flat on his cheek. Altogether, taking into account that the whole of his beard was shaved daily, which operation made the skin blue and coarse, he was about the most awful-looking object in the three islands. The man's character was, like his appearance, remarkable. By habit and disposition he

was quarrelsome and brutal. Occasionally, not often, he indulged in the pastime of getting drunk. When this occurred he invariably got up a fight with somebody. His immense strength enabled him to achieve an easy victory and to punish his victim unmercifully. Stories were current that he had lamed men for life in these fights. Brown had originally migrated to New Zealand from Tasmania. In the latter place he had served out the ten years' penal servitude to which, when a young man, he was condemned for some "good deeds" in England.

But perhaps the most remarkable feature of the man's character was his abject fear of his wife. Although but a little woman, she ruled him with a rod of iron: and he positively quailed before her angry tones and occasional blows—with the first heavy thing she could hands on—like a schoolboy being caned. What the secret of her power over him might be, no one knew; but the fact only was patent—that she was, to all intents and purposes, mistress and master. A good deal more was known of her that need not be mentioned in detail, and which, somehow, he did not dare resent. He had "taken up" with her in Tasmania: she also having been conveyed thither, free of expense, by a paternal government. When their "times" were "put in," they had married and crossed over to New Zealand. Here they appeared to be getting on prosperously. Candidly, in a business point of view they deserved to do so. Their "hotel" was well kept, and would have compared favourably with many of far higher pretensions. Mrs. Brown was always civil and obliging to customers. Mr. Brown also—when he was not drunk.

When we quitted the hotel, Captain Murray, having arranged for lighters in which to land the sheep, returned to his ship, I and Baker with him. We were introduced to Mrs. Murray, his pretty young wife, who had come up with him for the trip. Seated on the poop under the awning, Murray told us then what he had not chosen to say to the excited crowd at the hotel,—that he had seen Manley at Wellington on the previous Thursday.

"He seemed in uncommon good spirits," remarked the captain, "and told me he was then about to enter on the post of manager at Captain Nelson's farm at the Hutt. I never much liked the look of the fellow—but still I can scarcely think he committed the murder."

"Who else is there that can have done it?" cried Baker, sharply. "Why, look at the circumstances, Murray!—at his running off from the place—and in company with that baggage!"

Meanwhile, I, sitting silent, resolved to make a few more inquiries round and about Omaru on the morrow; and if nothing more turned up, to take passage in the "Kenilworth" with Captain Murray up to Wellington, in pursuit of Manley and David Thompson's worthless wife.

And the perilous passage we unexpectedly encountered, when at

starting everything had looked so fair and prosperous, has already been recorded. Nothing but God's mercy brought us to our desired haven.

The morning after our arrival, Wellington was bright and lovely; not a trace of the storm remained. The sun shone in unclouded splendour; the trees and hedges appeared laden with brilliants, as it shone upon the sparkling dew-drops.

The first thing was to find Manley—who was, as I supposed, at the Hutt, Captain Nelson's place. It was necessary to be cautious, lest he should take alarm. The arrival of a stranger at Wellington, in those days, was a matter for general observation.

My earliest move was to seek out Fred Atkinson, the chief inspector of police; a shrewd, energetic, clever man. I had known him in Otago, where he had first settled. It was early when I got to his office: and there I met with check number one. Atkinson was away. He had gone to the Hutt the previous day, and would not be back until noon. I determined quietly to wait.

It so happened that my watch wanted a new glass. This had been broken on board during the gale. So I went to Levi's to get it put in. Old Levi's shop might be called an universal one: his stock was miscellaneous. The ostensible business carried on was that of watch-maker: or, rather, mender. But all sorts of sundries were there: from an opera-glass to fish-hooks. While the glass was being fitted, I looked about upon the motley collection, and saw to my intense astonishment, I may say horror, the watch of David Thompson.

It was a peculiar watch; I should have known it amid a thousand. A bulky, old-fashioned, double-cased turnip, with a wide irregular crack running across the glass. What brought it in Levi's shop? Clear as the day seemed Manley's guilt now. Manley was here in Wellington—so was the watch. No one else had left Omaru since the murder. He and Thompson's wife had been the only passengers up from thence by the "Little Wonder." I took up Thompson's watch, and pretended to examine it. Inwardly, I was debating how to act.

"Mr. Levi, may I ask how you came by this watch?"

"I bought it."

"Now, look here, Mr. Levi, it's no use beating about the bush. I want to know where you got this watch. What's more, if you don't tell me the truth at once, I shall be obliged to find a way to make you."

"Well, then, I got it from Ned Long."

"Ned Long!" I exclaimed. "You mean Ned Manley."

Levi looked surprised. "I don't know nobody of the name," said he. "I got the watch from Long, and I can prove it."

"How long has it been in your possession?"

"About a week."

"Oh, indeed! Who is Ned Long?"

"He's a sailor on board the 'Little Wonder.'"

"Is he? Did he give any account of how he came by it?"

"No. He said he bought it cheap, on spec."

"I should like to see the man. I suppose he is still on board the steamer."

"Oh, he's there, fast enough."

"Now, Mr. Levi, I don't intend to part with this watch yet awhile. In the mean time, as I am a stranger to you, I will, if you choose, leave a deposit on it."

Leaving the shop, I hurried to the beach, and got to it just in time to see the "Little Wonder" steam out of the harbour on her voyage to the Ahuriri. On inquiring of the owners, they told me she would be back in three days, and that a man named Long *was* on board. At two o'clock I went to Fred Atkinson's office and found him there. Listening to what I had to say, he expressed his opinion that the guilty man was Manley, and no other. He asked me to describe him.

"Ah," said he, when I had finished, "I saw that fellow in Nelson's yard last night. Nelson told me he was going to take a new overseer. We'll get hold of him."

By four o'clock Atkinson and I were mounted, and on our way to the Hutt, having obtained a warrant from the resident magistrate for Edward Manley's apprehension. Arrived at the Hutt, we crossed the bridge, and met Captain Nelson. But here was another disappointment—Manley was no longer at the place.

On the previous evening he had suddenly declined the situation, on the plea that the wages were insufficient: and had that morning started, bag and baggage, his wife with him—she passed for his wife—taking the road to the Wairapa. Captain Nelson invited us to stay the night with him. He was quite incensed with Manley for trying to push himself and his companion into a respectable household; and said he should like to join us in the pursuit. Atkinson made no objection.

At daylight we were up, and breakfasting. Half an hour later we started for the Wairapa. The sun had set when we arrived there, and rode up to the "Waterloo Inn." Upon entering the public room, who should be seated in it alone—to my intense surprise—but Manley! Without a moment's hesitation Atkinson ranged up along side of him.

"Edward Manley, you are my prisoner."

It was over in an instant. He was so taken aback that he made no resistance, only turned deadly white. The first shock over, he started to his feet.

"What d'ye mean? What's the charge?" stammered Manley.

"You'll know that soon enough," said Atkinson. "In the mean time, I'll take care you don't get the chance to give us another run after you. To-morrow you will go back to Wellington."

He soon recovered himself. "All right," said he. "If I must go, I



must. Perhaps, though, you wouldn't mind stating what I'm in custody for?"

"You know, fast enough. You need not try it on with me."

"Upon my word I do not. Unless it's for breaking my agreement with the captain there," he added.

"It's something a little more serious than that," returned Atkinson. "The charge is wilful murder!"

"Wilful murder!" echoed Manley. "Wilful murder!" he repeated, with a sort of laugh that sounded rather hysterical. "And pray who accuses me of it?"

"I accuse you of it," I said, standing forward.

"You, Mr. Wilson!" cried the man, and it seemed that he had not before noticed me. "Why, here's—here's everybody here! Perhaps you'll not mind telling me, sir, who it is I've murdered."

"Don't be so callous, so brazen, man. You know well enough that you have killed poor David Thompson."

The strange look that rose to Manley's face was such that I declare I thought he was going to have a fit. "David Thompson!" he gasped out. "Is *he* dead?"

"Now don't you add hypocrisy to your guilt, Manley," roared out Captain Nelson, in a passion. "I know you can show a smooth face and plausible tongue when it suits your game. How dared you pass yourself and that woman off to me and my household as man and wife?"

"Well, I did do that; I can't deny it," said Manley. "There's plenty besides me does the same. But—murder! so help me Heaven, I never did it! I ran off with his wife, but I never killed him."

"Well, you are not obliged to say you did," observed Atkinson. "Anything you say now will only be used against you later, perhaps. You will have a chance to make your tale good before Mr. Jameson at Wellington."

Leaving Atkinson to his charge, I went to find Mrs. Thompson. She was upstairs in one of the rooms, reading a shilling novel at the open window. A handsome, bold-looking woman, of fine figure. My entrance did not seem to disconcert her: on the contrary, she rose from her chair and received me easily.

"Oh, Mr. Wilson! are you in these parts? I had no idea of seeing you here, anyhow."

"Probably you had not, Mrs. Thompson. I am willing to believe you are yet in ignorance of what has brought me here. At any rate, I did not expect to see *you* in such a position."

"Oh dear! I suppose it's fair for a woman sometimes to change her mind," she carelessly said. "I'm not the only one has done the like."

"That part of it concerns me not. It rests with your own conscience."

"Indeed, then, but my conscience won't spoil my appetite. So you need not be troubled for me, sir, thank you."

"Not at all. A far more solemn thing is troubling me than any conduct of yours."

"Oh! indeed! Maybe you'll let me know what this solemn thing is?"

And when I told her, she had the grace to change her mood. No woman could have been much more overcome than she. It was an awful shock to her, and nothing less.

The following day Manley was taken before Mr. Jameson, at Wellington, and the charge preferred: myself and the watch being the chief witnesses against him.

His defence seemed plausible enough. He had left the "Crown Inn" on that Sunday evening with Thompson and Nat Brown. But it was he who had soon separated from them, he said, not Brown. Brown and Thompson turned back together to the "Crown:" he (Manley) rode home alone, and reached it at six o'clock. Manley was shown the watch, and recognized it for his employer's: but he declared that he had never had it in his possession, and had never—so far as he knew—seen Ned Long in his life.

Nothing more could be done until Long could be present; and the prisoner was remanded, strongly protesting his innocence. The affair created great interest in Wellington: and the quay was crowded with people, looking out for the "Little Wonder." When the case came on again, the crush in court was something fearful.

Levi was the first witness examined. He deposed that he bought the watch off Ned Long, and paid him thirty shillings for it. Long was called next, and sworn. He said, in answer to question, that he had been on board the "Little Wonder" on her last trip to Omaru, and that he had sold a watch on his return to Mr. Levi for thirty shillings.

"Do you think you should know the watch again?" was asked him.

"I am sure I should, sir. I could swear to it."

"Do you know the prisoner there, Edward Manley?"

"I saw him on board the boat coming up that time," was the reply.

"I did not know him before."

"Did you have much conversation with him?"

"I did not. I don't remember that I spoke to him at all."

"Do you know that watch?" was the next question put to Long.

"Yes, sir. It's the same one that I sold to Mr. Levi."

"Now, remember that you are upon your oath! Where did you get that watch?"

The witness paused for just a single moment. And the stillness in court was such that you might have heard a pin drop.

"I bought it in Omaru."

"Of the prisoner?"

"No; I never had any dealings at all with the prisoner. I got the watch from the man at the hotel there—Nat Brown."

Before the words had well left the man's lips, the truth came flashing across me—It was Brown who had done the murder; not Manley. Still, the fact of Brown's disposing of the watch did not prove it against him, or *disprove* that it was Manley. Manley was remanded again, and bail refused.

The "Little Wonder" was starting that night for Omaru. Atkinson and I took passage by her. We arrived the next day but one, at early morning.

There was plenty of news to greet us. Nat Brown was dying. He had got up a fight with an American sailor belonging to one of the coasting vessels: in the scuffle, the latter had, as his countrymen not unfrequently do, used his knife. Nat Brown was fatally stabbed: and a very few hours would see the last of him. But what chiefly concerned us was—that Brown had confessed to the murder of Thompson. Brown had drunk too much on the Sunday afternoon. Manley quitted them, as he had said, Brown inducing Thompson to go back to his hotel for another nobbler. Thompson offended him just after they turned; and Brown, according to his quarrelsome custom, determined to have a fight for it. By way of commencement, he dealt Thompson a blow on the back of the head with his heavy iron-headed riding-whip, which knocked him off his horse—stunned. He then jumped down and, in his rage, began booting him. Finding that he continued to lie, quietly taking it all, he examined him, and found him dead. His skull had been crushed in at the first blow. It was easy enough after that to hide him in the bush and let the horse go free. Brown intended to go over on the Monday night to bury him: but Baker happened to be there beforehand. How the dog, which had been tied up at the farm till the Monday morning, found him, was somewhat surprising.

And there's little more to add. Nat Brown's end was rapid: before we reached the hotel, on quitting the steamer, he was gone. He lies not far from poor David Thompson, until they shall rise together at the Last Day. Mrs. Brown sold everything off; and, it was said, returned to England. Manley was, of course, set at liberty: but just at the time he was not held in too good public odour. Daniel Thompson's widow became his wife, and they established themselves in an excellent farm not an hundred miles from Wellington. *Now* they are looked upon as steady-going and very respectable people. Their past history is forgotten; to a great many not known: and in the colonies the old principle is mostly acted upon of letting bygones be bygones.

But some of the settlers there will be able to tell you the story yet. And the two events are never related separately, but have become, as it were, connected together in history—David Thompson's murder, and the wonderful escape of the "Kenilworth."

H. W.

## MARK AKENSIDE'S LOVE.

BLANCHE DESMOND sat by the window in silence, her profile clearly cut against the sunset light. She was calm and still. Near her was a gentleman—Mark Akenside—and he wondered, as he watched her, whether it was “in her” to be anything else—whether any man’s voice could deepen that delicate rose-flush on her cheeks, or make the long lashes quiver which shut in those quiet eyes, blue as the bluest seas, or stir the lips to a thrill of longing. She was like a morning sky, all rose, and azure, and pearl, with hair golden as sunlight. Who could prophesy of her high noon, her crimson sunset?

Of the other one’s capacity for emotion—Maud—Akenside never doubted. She was fair, too: but then she was intensified in every particular. Her eyes were of that clear, bright peculiar colour that looks like amber; her golden hair had red lights in it—real Guinea gold; and the blood in her cheeks came and went like a breath of flickering flame. She was more *petite* than the tall, stately girl who sat by the window—a little firefly, a flashing humming-bird, anything else tiny and tropical. She stood now in the waning light, and sang to a dreamy air—

“I am weary of rowing,  
Let me drift—let me drift!”

Akenside had been watching them both with almost absorbed interest. He could not decide which of the two he admired the most, or which had grown up to be the most beautiful. Until recently, he had not seen them for six years. That both had won upon him in no measured degree, had in fact stirred his heart, he was but too conscious of. Quitting his seat by Miss Desmond, he crossed over to the singer.

“When did you ever do anything but drift?” he asked. “Did you ever have a strong, fixed purpose in your life, Maud?”

He was startled at the look of passionate earnestness which answered him. Her voice fell into a low key, as if it were her soul which was speaking to his.

“Yes, one. Most certainly one.”

“And that was—will you tell it me?”

“Never, heaven helping me.”

“Why, how tragic you are?”

“Life is tragic, I think.”

As if startled at what she had said, Maud went out at the low window to the balcony in great haste, her silk robe rustling softly after her.

There she sat down, out of sight, but not of ear-shot. Mr. Akenside looked around at Miss Desmond with a smile.

"What a piquant child Maud is?"

"You are mistaken," the elder sister quietly replied. "Maud is in some respects a very strong woman."

They fancied they knew each other well, these Desmond girls, as sisters who have lived all their lives together are apt to fancy; but they were often puzzled notwithstanding. Maud used secretly to wonder whether Blanche had a heart, and Blanche gravely questioned in her own mind whether Maud could have any soul.

They had been neighbours all their lives, the Akensides and the Desmonds; but Mark had been away for years, and it seemed to him that he was making their acquaintance for the first time, so altered were they—and he. After his college life was over, he had gone roving half over the world. Now he had come home again—and meant to settle down. His mother would like him to marry one of the Desmonds—he knew it by instinct: and he was beginning to think he should like it very much on his own account.

Is there a spice of the Mormon in some men? There certainly was just now in Akenside. He could not tell which of the two he liked most; or which he would make his wife. Marriage involves a good deal: and perhaps he might not have been quite ready to take them both, even though the law had allowed it. He sat and watched Blanche now—the cool, clear-cut face coming between him and the sky, looking as if in the whole range of surprises there were not one which could change her calm sweetness by a shade. Truly she was a very beautiful woman. But—could she ever love?

Careless and impulsive always, his thought sprang to his lips—"Do you think any man could ever ruffle your stately calm, Miss Desmond, or cause your heart to beat a shade faster?"

Her cheek flushed a little at the question. He did not see it.

"I *should* like to understand your capacity for emotion," he continued, in a jesting tone.

"I should not. I pray heaven never to discover it to me."

Akenside looked at her in surprise. Her words held the passion and power of some unexpressed consciousness, but her face was still and calm as ever. What a triumph it would be, he thought, to deepen by ever so little the rose on those cheeks, to make those level-fronting eyelids droop. His heart stirred within him at the thought. At that moment Maud began to sing in a low tone, and he called to her.

"Titania!"

The girl heard him, and came, facing him like a queen; the silken sheen of her bright silk trailing round her, the golden hair crowning her small stately head. She bowed it slightly.

"Well, Mr. Akenside?"



"I left you a child when I went away, Titania; you and Blanche both. After six years I come back to find you—yourselves. Out of the incongruity between what you are, and my recollection of you, has arisen a singular mistake. I packed a portmanteau with gifts for you during my travels; some for you and some for Blanche; a relic from every spot where I pitched my tent. If you had been grown up when I went away, I should not have ventured on the audacity. As it is, what am I to do with the things I bought for two little girls? My mother wears her widow's black, and I have neither sister nor sweetheart."

Miss Desmond did not speak, but Maud's curiosity passed the bounds of her will.

"What were Blanche's, and what were mine?" she asked.

A gleam of merriment shot from Akenside's hazel eyes. "So you condescend to be curious, young lady! May I show you the trifles? If I bring them over in the morning, can you answer for your sister as well as for yourself, that they shall be inspected, and fair judgment passed upon them, as to how my taste and your peculiarities accorded?"

Miss Desmond began to utter a protest, but Maud put her hand over her lips.

"Yes," Maud said, "I *am* curious. You shall bring them, and we will look at them—I answer for both of us. It is something to have been remembered among the beguilements of the far, fair foreign lands. We shall be grateful for the memory, at least."

"Thank you."

"But how is it that you have not brought them before?" questioned Maud in her curiosity.

"Ah, thereby hangs a tale of carelessness and lost luggage. However, it has come to hand now."

Akenside made his adieu then, and passed on to the lawn through the window. Maud, in her careless freedom, went with him across it. He looked back, and saw Miss Desmond sitting still where he had left her, in her glistening white silk dress, and the thought she suggested to him was that of an angel. Was she destined to be the good angel of his life? Yes, he hoped it. The next moment, Maud spoke to him; and as her syren-sweet tones stole to his ear, and he looked into her flushed changing face, he wondered whether it was an angel he wanted, after all. Would not a woman, a warm, radiant woman, suit him better? There was little of the celestial in him, heaven knew.

Do you complain of Akenside already? He was but a type of many another man. And—as will readily have been understood—he had not as yet learnt to love either.

The world was very well contented with Mark Akenside as he was, and did not stop to wish him more of a hero. He was a great, strong, handsome fellow, with his curling hazel hair, his sunny hazel eyes, his

well-cut features, and his head like a Grecian statue's. He was Greek in his temperament, too—beauty-loving, pleasure-loving, quaffing existence like wine, with just enough of Teutonic mysticism thrown in to make him imagine that he aspired for something beyond the life he so thoroughly enjoyed. A gentleman born and bred, he was rich also. The Desmonds were rich. On neither side could there be any temptation to be mercenary; and I sometimes think that the truest loves are where both sides are too rich to need any addition to their fortunes, or too poor to expect any. Akenside was free to bring home a bride dowerless or not, as it suited him. His mother was anxious for it, and he loved to please her. She was doubly anxious that the bride should be one of those bright, healthy, well-descended, well-reared Desmond girls.

The next day was warm, with the tender warmth of perfect June. The sky was deep blue, flecked here and there with fleecy white; over the shining fields, uncertain shadows of those white clouds wavered and went out. The roses were in bloom; and they clustered up the trellis-work in blossoms, crimson-hearted, and pale pink.

Miss Desmond had gathered some of them, and put them in her hair. They drooped low, and their perfect pink heightened a little the softer bloom of her cheeks. She wore them also in the belt of her white morning dress, and other ornament she had none. Akenside coming up, and seeing her leaning against a pillar of the balcony, thought that so Miranda might have looked when Ferdinand saw her for the first time. The fancy was inconsequent and idle, as most of his fancies were; for there was a speculation in Miss Desmond's eyes, an insight into men and things, which was never caught in Prospero's enchanted isle.

Just as he reached her side, Maud came dancing out, a perfect Fay Vivien, in brilliant green. Her beauty was of that piquant and fascinating kind which is constantly changing, and seems, with every change, to have taken on new radiance. Akenside had been romancing to himself about Blanche just before; but somehow Maud, all glitter, and grace, and sparkle, put his fancies to flight with the first gleam of her presence.

A servant had followed him with a portmanteau, which, at a sign from his master, he put upon a chair on the verandah, and then retired. When Akenside had greeted them, and inquired after Mrs. Desmond, he took out a key and flourished it.

"Now, young ladies," he said, "imagine me a magician. I can give you, being so, whatever you may wish. What will you have? Laces?—cashmeers?—jewels?"

"A heart," Maud answered, saucily, before Miss Desmond could speak.

He turned the key, and lifted the cover of the portmanteau. Then

he drew out the daintiest of inlaid boxes, in which he touched a little spring and revealed an Etruscan chain of the most exquisite workmanship. From this he silently took off and replaced in the box a coral hand, carved with the daintiest art of the Neapolitans, and left on the chain, sole pendant, a heart of the most perfect shade of pink coral, wrought also with the exquisiteness you find nowhere out of Naples. With the utmost gravity, he hung the chain round Maud's neck.

"Oh, Mr. Akenside!" cried Maud, in her delighted surprise.

"It is your turn now," he said to Blanche; "what will you have?"

"A lily," said Miss Desmond, smiling. "You used to call it my symbol."

She thought that she had put the magician at fault; but there was a curious light in his eyes. He bent towards his coffer, and, glancing at her, said over it some foreign words, which might have been an incantation. Then he took something from it, and laid the something in her hand. It was a little casket of carved ivory, which opened and disclosed a brooch and ear-rings of pearls—each ring the loveliest drooping lily-bell, the brooch a cluster of them.

"The poor magician did not forget the lily of home," he said, not venturing to attempt to put on these ornaments as he had Miss Maud's; but looking at her entreatingly. She had meant to take none of his gifts; but this one, so exquisite in itself, so delicately suggestive of the remembrance in which he had held her, was not to be refused. So Blanche Desmond hung the rings in her ears, and clasped the brooch at her throat, and there was, or Akenside thought so, a shade more of bloom upon her cheeks, a glance of brightness in her eyes.

For Maud there were ornaments of the carved coral to match her heart—roses exquisitely cut, and over one of which a bee hovered, fastened by art so delicate that he seemed poised in air. Maud had been the rose of the old time, as Blanche the lily, and now, in her turn, a gay triumph gleamed in her eyes. He gave her sandal-wood also, for she liked powerful odours, and otto of roses, each drop holding the distilled sweetness of an Eastern garden. Maud, careless Maud, received it all; but Miss Desmond would take nothing more. He shook out Oriental silks to show them, shawls heavy with patient stitches, laces like cobwebs. One of the rarest of the shawls was left out, an offering for Mrs. Desmond; the rest he put back. Maud told him these treasures must be kept for the only woman who could ever wear them with propriety—his wife.

"And if she never come?" he rejoined, pausing to look at Maud as he was turning the key.

"Then you may leave them to me in your will."

"What a satire it seems on our belief in immortality, that we can take gifts so much more readily from the dead than from the living,"

mused Blanche aloud. "In some things we Christians are half heathens. It is just as though we fancied that, because the dead are out of our sight, they are dead for ever."

"Perhaps you women shrink from the gifts of the living lest the giver should claim too much in return," Akenside ventured to say, as he leaned over the front of the balcony by Miss Desmond's side. And most decidedly the young lady blushed now.

Maud came waltzing out again. She had been getting a small hand-mirror, and stood looking at herself and her coral adornments.

"Oh, but they are beautiful!" she cried. "I don't know what I can give you for them."

Mr. Akenside turned to her. The amber eyes were shining with a soft radiance, the cheeks were flushed. The red-gold hair, such as Titian painted years ago, was falling around her, for she had loosened its net. She was more attractive than Blanche then, and his heart told him so.

Was soul or sense strongest in this man? Perhaps this was the question the Fates were trying to solve, using these two women as tests. But he did not know it. He was conscious merely of a strange confusion of ideas, of a curiously vacillating purpose. If only he could be in the world with one of these two, without the other! was the thought that crossed his heart.

The Fates smiled, and gave him, in effect, this opportunity also. Maud was sent for by her godmother; not a fairy godmother, but a rich old aunt of her father's, who had given her her own name, and was expected to give her all her property. Wiseacres said Miss Desmond would probably inherit their father's place, Woodside, and Miss Maud her aunt's money—making them about equal. For the first time in her life Maud did not care to obey the summons. Her mother bade her remember her interests: Maud retorted that she did not care for anybody's riches, and did not want them. Miss Maud, however, was not quite her own mistress yet, and she had to leave Woodside for her aunt's. The fact was, the presence of Mark Akenside had been making home all too dear.

And when Mr. Akenside went over to Woodside now, there was only Blanche to receive him. Blanche, in her pure white robes and her calm graciousness: it seemed to him something like the sweet, cool moon light stealing into the soul after a day of heat. Maud had been all flashing sunshine and brilliancy: he began to think how good it was that she had gone.

Oh! those July days, in which they roamed together the dusky, aromatic woods; or surprised the water-lilies in their haunts; or learned new songs from the thrush breaking his heart with melody! Those short, swift summer evenings, when they watched the golden sunsets, and the rising moon! Akenside would go home afterwards to muse

and dream. During the passing of those days and nights he had found the gate to an earthly paradise.

And *she* thought so, Blanche Desmond, for she had learned to love him with her whole heart. She had been inclined to it from the first day of his coming home; but a doubt had grown up about Maud. It was set at rest now: for she thought she could not be mistaken. One day he spoke to her; telling her that she was the only woman he had ever loved or ever should love. How intensely happy she was—with a happiness too deep for words. It is the silent nature that tastes the most of joy and of pain. Seeing Blanche now, even Maud would never have questioned whether she had any heart. The calm of her nature was broken up at last. New light shone in her eyes, a vivid bloom upon her cheeks. She was pure as pearl still; but pearl with a soft radiance on it.

As yet, nothing was made public, and they enjoyed their own secret. Mr. Desmond was travelling; Mrs. Desmond, a nervous invalid, must not be agitated in the slightest degree. This lady had known and loved Mark Akenside almost as a son, and was quite easy upon the score of his intimacy with her daughter. She knew Blanche might be trusted with him: and, if they fell in love, she thought privately to herself, why, it would be no great harm.

Mr. Akenside came over the day after he had won Blanche Desmond's confession that she loved him, his mien that of a triumphant king who has been crowned, a hero who has won a victory. He brought with him the little exquisitely-wrought hand, which had been detached from the chain he gave to Maud.

"I kept this back," he said, "because I could give my hand to but one. It seems to me symbolic. Will you wear it?"

"Your heart did not seem symbolic, I suppose, or was it that the gift of that could be multiplied infinitely?" she returned, softening the words with a smile, however; and bending over for him to fasten his gift round her neck. But a thought had crossed her mind, and left in it a sharp and sudden pang—"He gives his heart to Maud, and his hand to me."

She banished the prophetic pain, which seemed to her at once morbid and ungenerous; and perhaps she was happy enough in the hours which followed to balance fairly some of the sad ones to come. Maud had been expected home, but they got a telegram from her: her aunt would insist on keeping her for another week. And so Mark Akenside and Blanche had a respite, and the sunny days crept on.

Is there not an alchemy in young true love, which can distil into a week bliss enough for a life? After Egypt's queen had melted her pearl and drank it, she would have been inconsequent indeed to expect to see it shining clear upon her bosom.

The second week in August brought Maud home. Neither of them



said anything to her. *He* did not speak of their engagement, and Miss Desmond shrank from doing it, she could not tell why. But Maud was sharper-sighted than both of them put together: selfish people sometimes are. The difference was indeed great—oh, if that vacillating man, Akenside, had but discerned it from the first! Blanche thought but of the happiness of others: she was generous as the day. Maud thought only of self. He dined at Woodside that first evening of her return, and Maud kept her eyes open.

He either loves her, or thinks he does, she said to herself.

The thought was bitter to her. She had begun to care for him before she went away, and the tedium of her absence had nursed her fancy into something she believed to be the love of her lifetime. Had she lost him by that absence? She shivered a little as she left them and sat down to the piano.

It fronted the room, so that Maud could see them as she played; and she fancied she saw some looks, heard some tones, that told their own story. She began a low, dreamy song. Her voice had no wonderful power or wonderful sweetness, but it had a curious, prevailing individuality of its own. With singular pathos in her tones, she broke into the chant, in itself full of despair:—

“We’re all alone, we’re all alone!  
The moon and stars are dead and gone;  
The night’s at deep, the wind’s asleep,  
And thou and I are all alone!  
What care have we, though life there be?  
Tumult and life are not for me!  
Silence and sleep about us creep;  
Tumult and life are not for thee!  
How late it is since such as this  
Had crowned the height of breathing bliss!  
And now we keep an iron sleep—  
In that grave thou, and I in this!”

Before the first verse was over, some power he was not strong enough to resist, had drawn Akenside to the piano. Listening, with his soul in his eyes, he stood. This girl was beautiful, surely, with the red glint in her golden hair, the full tide of light in her great amber eyes, the lips that sang, and the voice that charmed. Was there anything as satisfying, any such fulness of emotion in his quiet Blanche? The next moment he looked at *her*, pearl-white and pure, as she sat silently by the window, and hated himself that he had asked the question, and marvelled that it could have come over him.

It was a terrible thing that just at this time Mrs. Desmond should have had an accession of illness. Blanche had to be with her. Maud hated the sick-room, and did not try to be of any help in it. Of course she was free to roam at will, and to receive Mr. Akenside when he came, and to linger with him. Poor Blanche pressed her hands

together, and prayed to be helped to do her duty to her mother. Maud knew of the engagement now ; that was one thing : but she said nothing to her, or to him. Certainly not to him.

The days and the nights went on, and Maud glittered for ever before his eyes, or sang her way into his heart ; and he felt himself growing helpless, besieged in his stronghold by Fate.

One day, in a mood of desperation, he proposed to Blanche to make their engagement known to Mrs. Desmond, and to ask her consent to the marriage taking place before Mr. Desmond's return. He thought that this might serve to bind him—to impress upon him his obligations, and strengthen him in his conflict with himself. Blanche refused : the marriage must wait, she said, until her father could be present. She loved Mark Akenside so well that she was ready to lay heart and life under his feet ; but she could not do this unseemly thing. If Maud had quite understood her quiet, silent sister, she might have been more merciful, though she had never much regarded any law save her own will : but there were some riddles she would never guess, and she did believe that Blanche cared not for him who had been her lover. In Maud's heart youth and love were passionately strong. So she glittered on ; and after a while Mark Akenside's eyes were dazzled, and he saw nothing clearly.

"I wish I had stayed away from home," she said one day petulantly. She was often petulant to Akenside now.

"By Heaven ! I wish you had never gone from it !" he cried in sudden passion ; and then he turned and met the steady, calm gaze of Blanche, who had come into the room. He was not too brave to quiver in every nerve. Had she heard him ? What had he done ?

Maud shrugged her pretty shoulders with an air of *ennui* at the interruption, as she passed through the low window and bore on towards the dusky pine walk.

Akenside waited for Blanche to speak. He saw that the crisis had come. In truth, Blanche had been waiting for it. Her breaking heart had discerned how it was for some little time past. She looked at him with sad, kind eyes ; and a patient smile which pierced him like a sword.

"You see I was wiser than you, Mr. Akenside. I always feared that I knew you better than you knew yourself. But you must not think I blame you ; I know that you have been fighting a battle."

"Miss Desmond ! Blanche ! Don't judge me too harshly. As I live ——"

By this time she had taken the little carved hand from her neck, and was laying it in his palm.

"You perceive now that it was more truly a symbol than you knew. It belongs where the heart had gone before. Heart and hand should be joined by divine right, I think."

Mark Akenside had never loved any woman as passionately as he hated himself just now. He believed that in giving up Blanche he gave up the good angel of his life; and he longed to catch her escaping robes—for she wished to escape—to kneel in the dust of humiliation at her feet, to force his way to her heart again by the very force and passion of his beseeching. But something in her look forbade him, showing him that it would be worse than useless.

"Stay, Mr. Akenside," she cried in her pain. "Do you think I could accept a divided love?"

"Heaven forgive my folly!" was his answer. "You were too good for me," he slowly continued; and Mr. Mark Akenside could have gnashed his teeth as he felt the acrid truth. "And yet, if you had had patience enough you might have made a better man of me than I ever shall be now."

She did not answer him save with a gleam of tender pity in the clear, kind eyes, which had shed bitterer tears for him than he would ever guess or know of.

He went away from her; he could not for shame linger; but it was not to follow Miss Maud down the secluded path. Swinging through the gate in bitterness of heart, went he towards his home, self-contempt stinging him sorely. When he laid up the little coral hand which he had brought with him, he persuaded himself that it was for ever, unless in time his remorse and his constancy should win for him Blanche Desmond's pardon.

He stayed away from Woodside a whole week, nursing the aforesaid constancy and remorse; and when he went back there again Blanche was gone. She had chosen this epoch to make a long-delayed visit; her mother was better, and there was nothing to prevent it. So the field was clear for Maud, if she chose to use it.

That young lady received Mr. Akenside very coldly at first. He wondered whether his absence had piqued her, or whether her sister had told her any secrets; showing by this latter conjecture how little he really knew of Blanche after all. Like the vain, wavering, and most impressionable man he was, he suffered himself to fall into the old intimacy, and was with Maud daily. Again she wove around him her subtle, glittering meshes, and in a few weeks he was more hopelessly her captive than he had ever been her sister's.

One day, moved by some superstition, Mr. Akenside carried to her the hand of carven coral, and hung it on her chain. "When heart and hand have gone together, all must be right," he said to himself and to her.

This time his engagement was made known at once, and received the parental sanction. Mr. Desmond had returned. It was a match quite suitable for his daughter, and one that pleased him.

"But do you know I thought it had been Blanche?" observed Mrs. Desmond to her husband.

"If Mark Akenside ever had a chance to win Blanche, he has been a fool to choose Maud," was Mr. Desmond's answer. Why—to go no further—it would have joined his own broad lands and mine."

One day, just before the wedding, which Blanche came home for, Mr. Akenside asked Maud what had been the strong, fixed purpose in her life, which she had once so earnestly asserted, and so resolutely refused to tell him.

"To make you love me," the girl answered, after a minute's struggle with her pride. And somehow the words strangely grated on the ear of Mr. Akenside. Had he made a mistake? Had he made a mistake?

Too late to ask it now. He could not fling aside Maud as he had virtually flung her sister. Maud, at any rate, was supremely happy. And they were married. Through it all Miss Desmond was calm, and stately, and gentle: mistress of herself, but ever kind. Maud would probably go on for aye wondering whether her sister had any heart.

As for Mark Akenside, he will see sometimes from afar the calm and stately lily he had not discernment enough to gather, see her with a strange pang of regret and longing; just as doubtless he would have sighed now and then for Maud's butterfly beauty and glittering grace if he had married her sister. The one who was best and noblest among the three suffered most; but that is the way of the world. It is not the heartless and the unworthy who are called upon to endure tribulation.

